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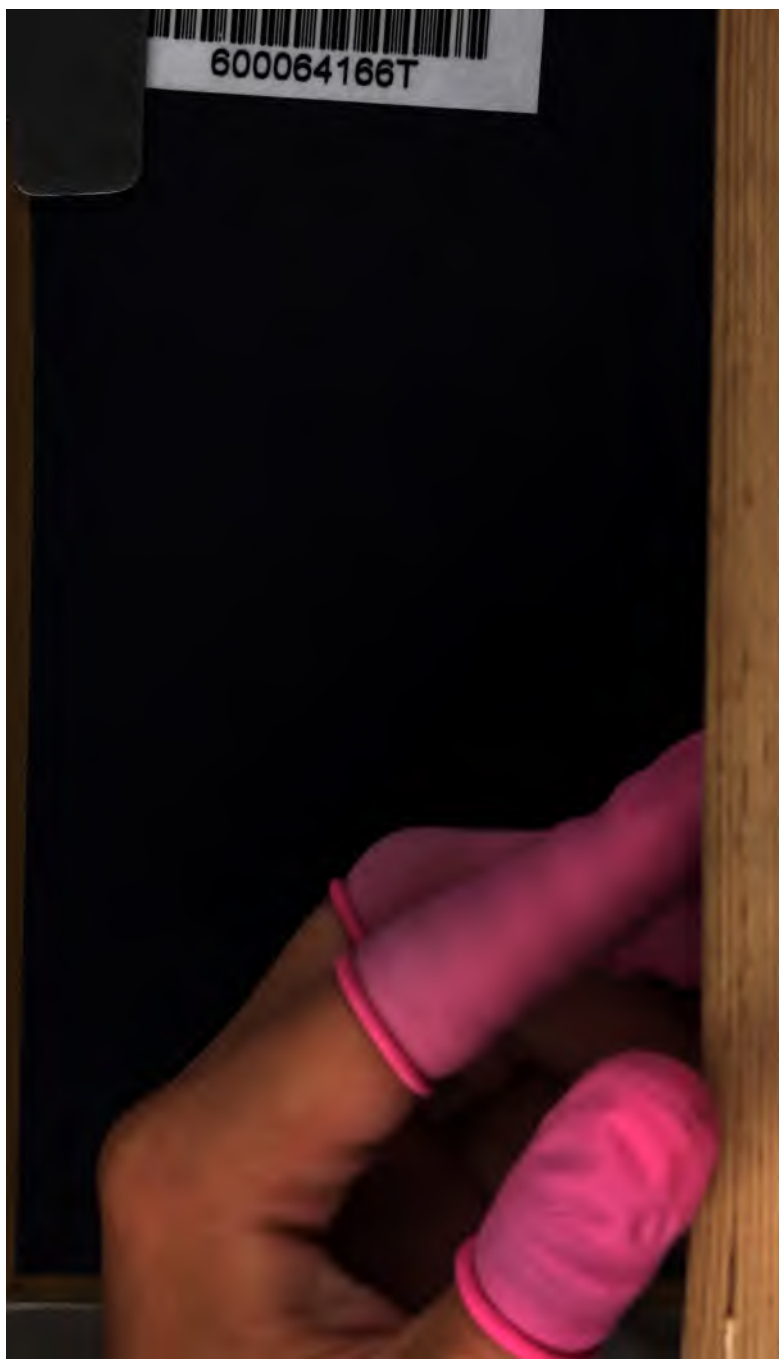
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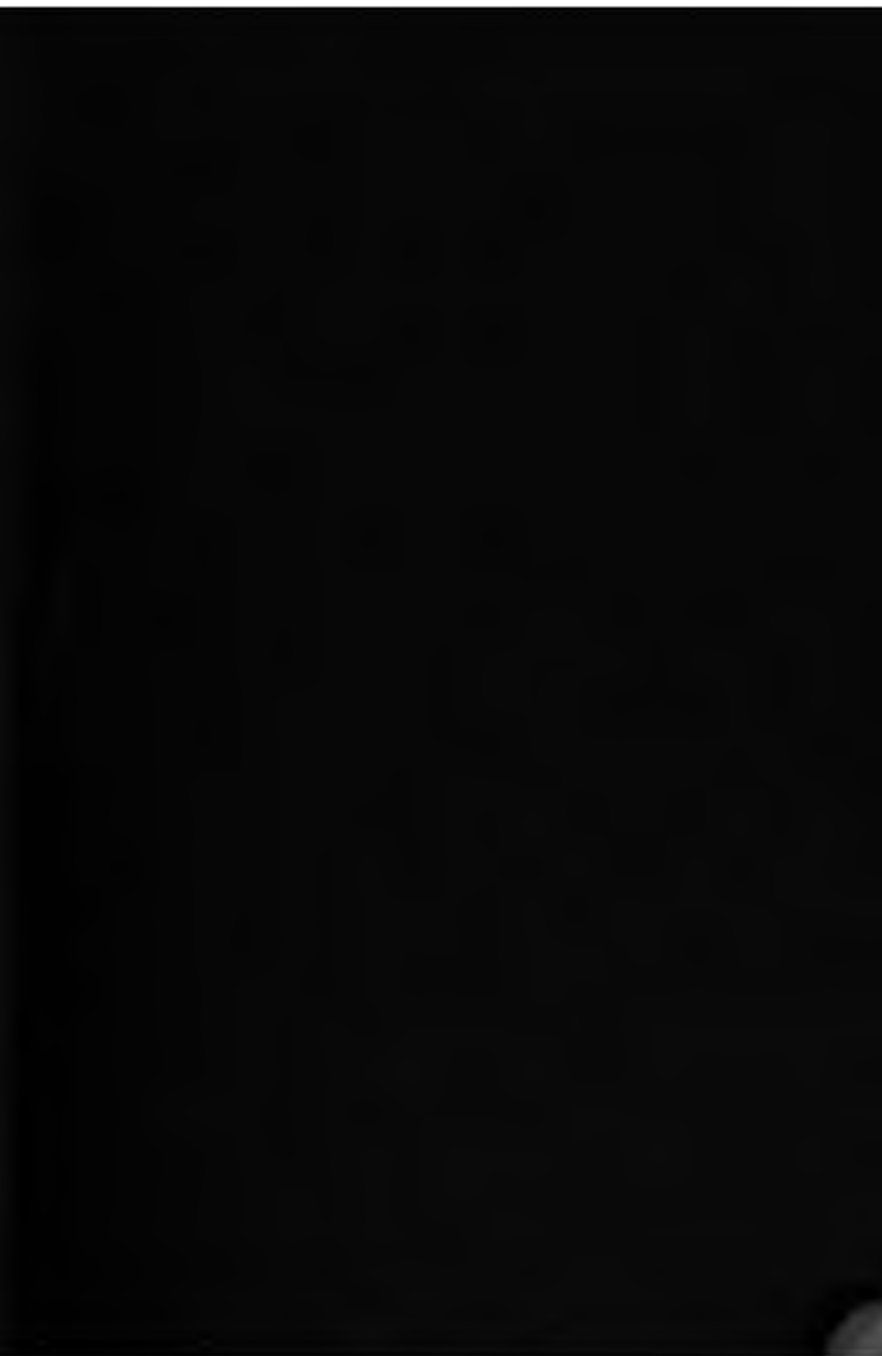






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MACHPELAH:

OR

LOST LIVES.

A NOVEL,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

A. G. W.

VOL. II.



"The stage is more beholding to love than the life of man. For as to the stage, love is ever matter of comedies, and now and then of tragedies; but in life it doth much mischief; sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury."

LORD BACON.

London:

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1879.

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MACHELAH : OR, LOST LIVES.

CHAPTER I.

CLEFT ASUNDER.

" Away ! away, the cords are mute,
The bond is rent in twain,
You cannot wake that silent lute,
Nor clasp those links again ;
Love's toil I know is little cost,
Love's perjury is light sin,
But souls that lose what I have lost,
What have they left to win ? "

W. M. PRAED.

VIOLET had been quite a fortnight in her lodgings, and had received no satisfactory answers to her advertisement, when one morning she beheld on her breakfast-plate two letters, one bearing the Ramsgate post-mark, whilst a glance at the other sufficed to

tell her it came from Nice. Fancying there was a probability of an enclosure from Harold being inside, she left the former letter as it lay, on her plate, and neglecting her breakfast, which stood on the small round table untouched, she went to a chair which she had placed in the window overlooking the street, and proceeded to peruse her letter, which was from Florence Lancaster. After her first disappointment at finding nothing enclosed from Harold—as she had half expected there would have been—she contented herself with the assurance that another few days must bring her something direct from Rome, and that after all it was only natural to suppose he would wait to receive a few lines from herself, after what he had said in his note on the morning before she left Nice.

These opinions, however, were destined to undergo a slight degree of change, after she commenced to read her letter.

“Mr. Weston heard from Mr. Trevelyan this morning,” said this epistle; “he seems to be enjoying Rome, and the people he meets with, immensely. He sent all sorts of kind messages to us, and wished to be remembered to you. He writes in capital spirits, and expects to be a captain very soon. The mother gave your letter to Mrs. Weston, who sent it on to him almost immediately after his to them had arrived.”

The remainder of what Florence had written, was taken up in little scraps of news and gossip, on the people who were still staying in the hotel, and in telling Violet about their own and the Weston's future plans. There was a cold indifference about the whole tone of the letter; and an indescribable something about those passages which bore reference to Harold, which caused her to feel a wee bit depressed.

With a somewhat heavier heart than the one she had brought down with her from her

bedroom, Violet returned to the table, and with a very poor appetite, began to eat her frugal breakfast. After this little fortification, she felt inclined to conclude that she had been working herself into a foolish expectation, and because this had not been realised, she was exaggerating its meaning ; so shaking off her despondency, she broke open her Ramsgate letter, which she rightly conjectured bore reference to her advertisement. It came from a Miss Hood, who kept a ladies' boarding and day school in Ramsgate, and the purport of it was requesting Violet to appoint an hour convenient to herself for an interview with Miss Hood in her own apartments, in case anything prevented her being unable to come to the school at ten o'clock of the forenoon the following day.

Violet had again seated herself in her favourite chair in the window, with her thoughts busily engaged on the chances of Miss Hood's engagement suiting her, when

she was surprised at the appearance of a stranger knocking at the front door, and enquiring whether a Miss Vernon did not lodge there? On the landlady assenting and inviting her to enter, she was introduced to Violet's sitting-room, and announced as Mrs. Knight. She was a slight made woman, rather more than thirty, above the medium height, and with a kind, almost benign expression of face. She was dressed in black, and evidently with a great deal of care and attention, as her things were not only fashionable, but fitted her figure to perfection. Her mantle, which was of black velvet, was trimmed with rich sable, as the day was cold, with one of those keen east winds blowing, which are so prevalent in England during the end of February and the month of March; and this mantle, together with a wide velvet hat and black ostrich feathers, which was most becoming to her face, gave her a very stylish appearance.

“ I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Vernon,” said she, in such gentle modulated tones, that they could rarely fail to fall upon a listener without a certain degree of captivation.

As Violet bowed a graceful assent, she continued in the same voice which she had used when she first spoke.

“ I have observed your advertisement in our local paper, and if my terms prove agreeable, and your accomplishments satisfactory, I think I can offer you the employment you are seeking to obtain. With this object I have intruded on you this morning, because I think an interview is generally so much more decisive than any other method of negotiating, besides I fear I was lazy and wished to spare myself the trouble of writing a note.”

Here Mrs. Knight made a pause, as if expecting Violet to say something which would suggest agreement on the advisability of the present interview.

“ It is very good of you to come. I cannot

consider it the least intrusion, but a very great kindness," replied the girl, blushing slightly, but more from an inward feeling of gratitude towards the intentions of this gracious stranger, than from any awkward confusion, which would at all times be unlikely to happen with Mrs. Knight, as she was one of those fortunate women who have the knack of putting all with whom they come in contact entirely at their ease.

"I live only a very little way from you, Miss Vernon," she continued, again leading the conversation. "And I see you pass my windows very often, at one time you walked occasionally with rather an elderly gentleman, but lately you have been always alone. I wondered who you could be, for you looked so young, and there is something about your face which interested me. You see how much you have been watched; I hope my confessions do not alarm you, coming as they do from such a perfect stranger."

Here Mrs. Knight laughed such a bright

infectious laugh that Violet caught it, and was again about to thank her for showing so much affability towards her, when she was prevented by Mrs. Knight continuing—

“I see, Miss Vernon, you are inclined to be amused at my very roundabout way of coming to business. I must apologise for this very bad habit which I seem in some way to have acquired, but I promise not to keep you in suspense very much longer on the object of my visit. By your advertisement then, I see that you mention singing as your chief accomplishment, and please don't look surprised, Miss Vernon, when you hear I have come to ask you to give me some singing lessons. What I really mean is—I want to engage you to pass an hour or two with me every other afternoon for the purpose of practising my voice, and work up some of my more difficult songs, which I have lately neglected. Are you agreeable to this arrangement, or is it beneath your acceptance?”

"By no means, Mrs. Knight," replied Violet, warmly, "I shall really be only too delighted and thankful to accept your kind offer. When may I come to you?"

"The beginning of next week, Monday afternoon at three o'clock, if that will suit you. I am a widow, without children, and living here with my mother; so I want some little occupation to make life interesting, and as there is never much fun in doing a thing all by oneself, I want you to help me. We have as yet said nothing about terms, so please let me know what will recompense you?"

"I have not the least idea, I have never given lessons in this way before," replied Violet, becoming, for the first time during their interview, slightly embarrassed.

"No? Then what do you say to my giving you five shillings a lesson, and paying you quarterly?"

"It is too much," said Violet, decidedly.

“ Besides, had you not better leave this, until you have heard me play and sing ; as you may be quite disappointed in the notions you have formed concerning my vocal attainments.”

“ I don’t think I shall be, but you may find me a more troublesome pupil than you bargain for—you will find me painfully slow about picking up a tune. I require to hear it a great many times first, which I am sure will bore you.”

And rising from her seat with a smile, she shook Violet’s hand warmly within her own.

“ Remember Monday,” said she, “ and come punctually at three.”

“ But, Mrs. Knight, you have forgotten to ask me for references ! ” exclaimed Violet, surprised at the easy way this pleasant woman made her arrangements.

“ References ! ” repeated Mrs. Knight, equally surprised, and likewise amused at the girl’s ingenuousness. “ Well, really, my

dear Miss Vernon, I think I hardly need them. What possible harm can a girl of your age do to a woman of mine? If I were engaging you for my children, I dare say so situated, I might act differently. But you evidently give me no credit for discernment of character. Don't you know that the preface to some books tell you at once whether they are good or not, and so it is with the expression of your face. At least, it is the same to me as if you had given me a volume of references. Good-by, until Monday !”

Mrs. Knight's kind face and gracious manners had acted on Violet's spirits like the ray of sunshine does on all of us when depressed by a morning of cloud. This woman possessed all that ready tact which goes with an amiable nature and an intelligent refined mind ; which not only avoids ruffling the temper, but has that thoughtful sympathy in the susceptibilities of others, which has the

effect of imparting through its enchantment a comfortable ease to those who appear stiff and embarrassed when in the presence of people who are devoid of it. In fact, to the rarity of a *savoir-faire* manner is due half the misunderstanding and awkward *mal à propos* speeches which are too often observable in society.

With a lighter heart, indulging once more in a hopeful future, we will now leave Violet and see what is going on in the *atelier* of Strada St. Stefano.

* * * * *

Vincent Grey's studio was a bare unfurnished apartment, scrupulously clean, and devoid of drapery, but not entirely of ornament, for besides the various little water-colour sketches, and copies of figures on mill-board, a number of paintings on canvas of considerable dimensions, bore testimony of a more ambitious turn of mind than the

smaller results, of industry mentioned before. Here and there were models of busts, and separate limbs of the human body, which latter hardly contributed to the attraction of several choice bits of *bric-à-brac* which were placed with a total disregard to either neatness or regularity. Besides pieces of old china, and two or three antique bronzes, there were vases formed of excavated earthenware, whose curiosity consisted of their net-work of cracks, showing the trouble these multitudinous bits must have taken to cement into their present entire and original shape. The furniture of the room consisted of three chairs, a deal table, and a large portable chest containing paints, brushes, oils, varnishes, palettes, and instruments, which go towards making an artist's requirements complete. This chest had on certain occasions to act the double duty of becoming a box ottoman, or extra seat, when Vincent Grey's visitors happened to out-

number his chairs. But on the day in question even a third duty had been somewhat unjustly imposed upon this chest, though possibly had it been blessed with the power of thought, this part of its performance might have been taken in the light of an honour, for, supported against the wall, and resting on the lid of this coffer, stood Vincent Grey's much admired picture, the Roman Peasant Girl, and seated before an easel opposite, was Harold Trevelyan endeavouring to catch the marvellous expression of the girl in this painting, and impart it to the shadowy, but gradually developing figure on the small canvas before him, upon which might already be observed several delicate touches, worthy of a master's brush. Harold has put on his friend's white painting coat, and there is a certain nonchalant ease about his present attitude and the surroundings in this studio which suit and seem to be in harmony with the man. He is contemplating the picture

before him, vainly endeavouring to discover what there is about this strange expression which reminds him a little of Violet. The features of this peasant girl do not in the least resemble hers, still there is an indescribable something which reminds him of his love.

“ I wonder if Violet were to go through a great deal of suffering, as the face of this girl tells us she has done, whether this expression would then come out more marked in her? I pray God it never may, but I hope I succeed in copying this peculiarity, because I should like to compare this face side by side with hers.”

“ At it again, old fellow, you are really quite indefatigable,” said a voice close behind him, which totally ruptured his dreamy musings, and turning round he beheld Vincent Grey, who had entered the studio unobserved, and had been critically examining his copy. “ You haven’t quite caught it yet, Harold, you should put a little darker shading

to that left eye," continued his friend, referring to the expression which he was aware had greatly taken Harold's fancy, though he was in darkness as to the true cause of its attraction. "Don't you think after you have eaten something, you might meet with better success? Breakfast is waiting for us, and the budget has come, even to the English papers. Nothing like variety of scene and thought to lend inspiration to the painter!"

Harold Trevelyan gave a short laugh, and laying his brushes and palette aside, he took Vincent by the arm and drew him to a more distant corner of the room, the better to judge of the merits of his morning's work.

"Who was the girl who sat for that picture, Grey? Because I know some one with a look a little like hers!"

"Do you? Then there is not the least possibility of your friend having anything to do with mine, if that's what you're driving at, because I copied the face of my flower girl.

from a miniature, not a family one. I know nothing about who she is, or rather was, for I suppose she can hardly be living now. My father picked it up in a pawnshop years ago, when he was idling about the streets of New York. The glass is broken, and it is in a very wretched looking case, but if you think it will assist you I will fetch it," and going to his chest, he produced a very faded brown case, and opening it before Harold, exposed the somewhat mutilated face of a lady, enclosed in a gold rim, altogether about the size of a watch, and, like that ornament of utility, it was surmounted with a ring, thereby giving evidence that it was intended to be worn. "You can keep it, if you like. I consider it of no further value to me!"

"I should really like to have it very much, if you don't mind parting with it," replied Harold, who had been a little disappointed at first to find it was in a more lamentable condition than he had expected, but on a nearer

inspection of the miniature, it had gained on his affection, as in it he perceived a stronger likeness to Violet than he had discovered in his friend's picture. "I will have it touched up by some one who understands and goes in for this kind of painting," added he, "and have it put into a new case."

Soon after this the two men were seated at the breakfast table, Harold devouring the contents of his letters instead of his meal, Vincent Grey, on the other hand, preparing to do justice to his food with the school-boy eagerness of a craving appetite, and heeding neither letters or papers before the inner man had been satisfied.

"Now, then, Harold, don't let these things get cold," said he, cramming into his mouth an enormous piece of broiled chicken as he spoke.

"Not just yet, thanks, old fellow, I want to read this letter."

"Have you some jolly good news? What's

that blue document on the table? Perhaps it's about your promotion!"

"I dare say it is," replied Harold, in the tone of voice of one who is becoming slightly bored.

"If it is, that would have been the first I should have opened had I been you. I never saw such a rum fellow as you for taking things quietly."

"Perhaps I should have, had it been from the queen of my heart instead of the Queen of my country," returned Harold, carelessly expressing his own thoughts.

"There won't be much left for you to eat on this table if you don't look sharp," again remarked his friend, loading his plate for the third time from one of the dishes on the table, when he was startled by a stamp on the floor from Harold, who remarked rather contemptuously, looking at his friend—

"My dear fellow, pray don't starve yourself on my account, I have no doubt I shall

find plenty to satisfy me, even after you have finished."

"You won't, if I continue eating at the same rate I have been doing," remarked Vincent, dubiously casting his eye over the table, and looking ruefully at the few remaining scraps of the broiled chicken, which he was rather reluctantly leaving for his friend. "I don't know when I have felt so hungry as I do this morning," exclaimed he, apologetically, "it is not at all good for one to eat so much. May I open that blue letter of yours just to take my thoughts off my appetite?"

"Hang the fellow, how you worry, Grey!" said Harold, as he grunted assent to his troublesome friend's request.

"Well, old boy, you're a full blown captain from to-day, so give me your hand and receive my congratulations in true old English style. How many bottles of champagne shall I order in on the strength of it," and jump-

ing up from his chair in the most exuberant spirits, he slapped Harold on the back, expecting to meet with some show of responding heartiness. But Harold had by this time lost his patience and his temper too.

“What a fool you are, Grey! Why can’t you leave a fellow in peace! There is no such wonderful luck in a man being promoted, after he has been as long in the service as I have,” and with a lowering scowl on his brow, he turned his back on Vincent, whilst he crushed the letter he had been reading into his coat pocket.

“What’s up, Harold? No bad news, I hope! or anything of that sort is there?” enquired Grey surprised, and amazed at the snubbing reception his warm congratulations had met with.

“No, nothing much, Grey, only I don’t feel much inclined to be bothered. It is only one of those unpleasant little surprises which my aunt sends me from time to time.

The old lady manages to keep the screw on as tight as she can, which is enough to make a fellow feel blue, when he knows he has debts which ought to be liquidated. But I dare say it will be all right now that I have my promotion, as she promised me then three hundred a year."

"Is there anything I can do for you, Harold? I can't help you out by lending you money, because I have none to lend, beyond a few pounds, which you are perfectly welcome to, but you may sell "The Flower Girl," if you think she will realize more than she has cost me in canvass, paint and brushes," said Vincent generously; with all the true happy-go-lucky characteristic of the Bohemian.

"Thanks, thanks Grey, I know you would do anything for me. You are such a good-hearted fellow, offering me all this after my ill-humour too. But the whole thing is a mere trifle. I am really in no difficulty.

You would laugh at the worry if you knew it." (Here Harold winced as one in pain, and turned visibly paler.)

"I don't think you can be quite well this morning," said Vincent, looking alarmed, "Shall I get you a glass of wine?"

"No, I would rather not have one, all I want is peace and quietness. Go back to the studio, Grey, I will join you there when I feel better."

His friend looked at him a moment, and hesitated. Then perceiving he could be of no use by staying, he did as Harold desired him.

It was rather hard on Miss Trevelyan, to say the least of it, to be thus accused by her nephew of upsetting his equanimity before Vincent Grey, when there had been nothing in her letter either approaching to stinginess or unkindness. *Au contraire*, she was again beginning to take a pride and an interest in Harold, and her sole object in writing was to

inquire when she would have to congratulate him, and increase his balance at his agents. It fell, therefore, most unjustly upon the old lady, this abuse her nephew had just levied upon her, when he had less reason than ever to be discontented with her treatment towards himself. The fact is, Harold was rather taken by surprise when Vincent Grey remarked the change that had come over him, and he was not only at a loss for another excuse, but had no time to prepare a suitable version of that which had been the real cause of his upset.

Harold was not at all a man given to subterfuge; his nature was too brave and fearless a one to be disposed to resort to the too ordinary means of extrication from difficulties by utilizing an indirect falsehood. He despised all men who used such contrivances; he could barely tolerate them from women, and he scorned them for himself. When, therefore, he came to look back on his

conduct of this morning, he felt ashamed of the cowardice he had displayed in concocting disparaging and untruthful aspersions on the present conduct of his aunt. Harold felt himself out of sorts with everything, and everybody ; so different did all appear to him now, to what it was a few hours before, when we saw him painting the picture in Vincent Grey's studio. He could not have defined his sensations, neither will I attempt to describe his feelings, but as the following letter will best explain the cause of his sudden mutation, we, for this reason, insert it for perusal :—

“ Nice.

“ MY DEAR HAROLD,—

“ Charlie had your letter yesterday, and like a selfish fellow, kept it all to himself, and would not let me see one word of it. Fancy that, Harold ! I am certain you would feel very savage with him for doing

this, did I not suspect you have some great secret between you, which you will not confide to poor Lucy. Charlie tells me yours to him was a business letter, but I can't quite swallow that, as I know how you hate anything to do with parchment, and I feel quite certain you said much which I might have commented upon in this. Dear Florence and I are awfully dull here since you left, and have nothing to console ourselves with, except to ring the changes on your praises. Don't you think this pretty compliment from me is quite returning good for evil, after your villainous behaviour in refusing to accompany us in our yachting expedition? Capt. MacDonald leaves Nice with the Lancasters in less than three weeks. I can see he hopes to terminate his little winter campaign here with the *coup de grâce* of a proposal, but I think you ought pretty well to know that the lady of his affections has her heart fixed in another direction.

“Charlie has forwarded to you a letter from your aunt, and a blue thing with a very important exterior. Perhaps it is something we shall have to congratulate you about. He tells me you are painting with your friend all day long, and that Mr. Vincent Grey has nearly finished an exquisite painting, which you fairly rave about. So you can imagine how much I long to see it. Tell your friend, from me, not to send this picture to the London Academy, as there is nothing uncommon in doing that, but to make a present of his “Flower Girl” to his Holiness, who would be certain to appreciate so delicate a compliment. Believe me, if Mr. Vincent Grey did this, his name would be made, as the papers would then eloquently discourse on the picture’s great merits, and by this means he would gain a world-wide reputation. Having obtained notoriety, honours would be showered upon him. The Cosmopolitan Art Critics would bestow upon him either

the bay leaves or the laurel crown, and thus adorned, he might probably receive from the hands of the grateful and indulgent Pontiff that enviable, and most estimable gift bestowed only on crowned heads (and a laurelled one, quite an exception), the Golden Rose. Mind and give Mr. Vincent Grey the benefit of this suggestion, Harold. Perhaps he will take my advice, and so prove wiser than you have ever been, who have always so coldly and heartlessly refused to put forth even your hand to pluck the cherished and much sought-after beautiful Lancaster Rose. This reminds me, that I was almost forgetting to mention that Mrs. Lancaster heard yesterday morning from that little friend of yours, Miss Vernon. Her friend, Mrs. Jessop, died the day after she arrived, and it seems has left her a very handsome legacy. She writes of the kindness 'she has met with from Mr. Daniel, in what I should consider exaggerated expressions of gratitude for any one to use, without it bore reference to the actions of a

lover ; when of course the circumstances of the case would be so entirely changed, that great allowance could be made for the feelings. From what I gathered from Mrs. Lancaster—but perhaps I may be stating facts quite incorrectly—it seems that this Mr. Daniel has been left the bulk of the property ; but that in Mrs. Jessop's will she has either stipulated, or made only the suggestion (I am really not at all clear which it is), that in return for this munificence to her cousin, the thing which she would most desire is that he should marry Miss Vernon after her death. Whether he or she lose their legacies if this happy event does not take place, I do not understand enough about the matter to affirm, though I rather fancy Mr. Daniel does, but not Miss Vernon ; but very likely I have given you a very false impression about it all. Charlie says I always do this, when I attempt to explain anything.

“ It would be a good match, I should say, for Miss Vernon, and if one may judge from her

gratitude towards this Mr. Daniel, I should say they must be very much attached. Florence Lancaster has seen him once, and says he is some years older than she is, but a very kind, good sort of man. It seems to me, I have written a much longer letter than I expected to accomplish when I first started my quill, but from knowing you always took a deep interest in Miss Vernon, I have written you all I have heard from the Lancasters about her. She wished to be remembered to you, and mentioned something about sending you a photograph of herself soon. Charlie is mumbling out something about scribbling to you next time, but if you have any more secrets to communicate, please confide them to me instead of to him.

“ With the Lancasters’ kind remembrances,
and our united best wishes,

“ Believe me to be, Harold,

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ LUCY WESTON.”

“Would Violet be likely to forsake and throw him over if matters really stood as Mrs. Weston had described them? and would her affection for him be so inconstant and transmutable that she would, on the first trial of her faith, barter her love for him to the pecuniary advantages which were offered her by another?”

Harold asked himself all these questions, but lost all his confidence when he endeavoured to answer them. His declaration of love to Violet had come almost as sudden and unexpected from himself as it must have been to her. Had it not been for the fatality of leaving them alone on the balcony on that last evening, he would have had no other such opportunity to say anything like all he had said then. That he himself was in love with Violet, he had never doubted for weeks past, but he had not (as we know) been quite so certain about her sentiments towards him until he had called them up and printed them

on the expression of her face, and read them there, as he fancied, from the tablets of her very soul. Was it possible that he could have deceived himself in all this? Could he have been mistaken in her? An hour ago he would have staked his life her love was all his own. But now he doubted, and doubting, felt like Shakespeare's words in his "Othello," that "Trifles, light as air, are to the jealous confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ."

Harold was extremely sensitive and imaginative. True as steel himself to that being whom he deemed worthy of his fidelity, he yet exacted from this being in return a superlative devotion to himself, and above all, like Cæsar's wife, "she must be above suspicion," since for him to imagine even a dubious perfidy (unless his doubts were immediately diffused from the aspersions which caused his mistrust) it would be fatal to his love, and with his love would, of course, be cancelled his oath of fidelity. His doubts in Violet's

faith had been a wee bit shaken at no letter having come from her; still more so were they shaken now, after having read the perfidious and fallacious passages which Mrs. Weston had so maliciously penned with so much barefaced effrontery.

Consistent, then, with that part of his character which we have been endeavouring to describe, Harold determined to smother his galled feelings and wounded pride by assuming a devil-me-care exterior of indifference, and made up his mind that he would write no more letters to Violet until something came direct from herself in answer to the two he believed to be now in her possession, which would, of course, either entirely disperse his suspicions, or, on the other hand, confirm them.

* * * * *

And Violet, what of her? As may be supposed by those who have followed her life

through these pages, she was placed in the same dilemma of doubts and difficulties as Harold, with the exception that no suspicions of infidelity had as yet been awakened within her. His silence to her was, of course, unaccountable; he was not ill, that she knew from the letter she had received from Florence. The only consolation she found to alleviate the uneasiness of this suspense was in having her time, thoughts, and attention exercised on her new employment. She had gone on the following Monday afternoon to give the first singing lesson to Mrs. Knight, and had found that lady as charming and agreeable as she had been on their first acquaintance; and these hours which she spent in the society of this friendly woman she considered among quite the happiest she enjoyed during her stay at Ramsgate.

Miss Hood's arrangement with Violet decided that she was to go every morning to the school for three hours to teach music and

English, provided the references given turned out satisfactory ; but on discovering, during their first interview, that Violet had formerly been a pupil at the Misses Faversham's, in Kent, Miss Hood regarded the advantages of tuition which were likely to be derived from a residence in that seminary in such high estimation, as well as the upright and honourable qualities of the ladies themselves—whom she (Miss Hood) had heard of, though had not the “felicity of their acquaintance,” as she phrased it—that this part of her education became a voucher in itself, and she was, therefore, quite agreeable to waive the usual form of applying for references, though, with schoolmistress preciseness, she considered it would be to their mutual satisfaction if she were to write a few lines to Mrs. Lancaster concerning Miss Vernon.

In consequence of this, Violet wrote another letter to the Lancasters sooner than she would otherwise have done. She was

still expecting any morning's post would bring her a letter from Rome, as the time of silence had, as yet, hardly extended even to that comparatively short period which justifies the lover's despair. She had no intention of writing to Harold again, through her friends at Nice. Besides, her innate modesty and pride revolted from taking such a step, though her feelings, in another way, might have prompted her to consider nothing so unbearable as inactive suspense. One thing, however, remained open to her which she thought she might still do without either compromising her own personal dignity, or leading others to suppose she was doing so. This was to send her photograph, which she had promised to Harold, in her letter to Florence, to be forwarded through the Westons.

Violet had ordered some fresh copies of herself to be printed, which had been taken by a London photographer just before she had left Tyler Grange, and these had reached

her the previous morning. They were by no means good specimens of Violet as she now was, though they were looked upon as such at the time they were taken. Nevertheless, she decided on sending one, and this photograph reached Harold one week afterwards, with the following letter from Mrs. Weston :—

“ Nice.

“ MY DEAR HAROLD,

“ Charlie is too lazy to write himself, so I again take up my quill, and intend driving it at all the little pieces of news which are likely to interest you.

“ This day week we shall be on our way to Naples, and after that our home will be on the blue Mediterranean for the next two months. Is there still any hope of your changing your mind, and coming with us? It would do you far more good than remaining in gloomy old Rome. It seems all is perfectly true about Miss Vernon, which I told you in

my last. Florence had a long letter from her yesterday, sending the enclosed photograph for you, with her kind regards. I must have misunderstood Mrs. Lancaster, though, concerning the loss of the legacies, as there is no such stipulation in the will; and their future union appears to have been a death-bed request; which they consented to. This makes the affair look much better than it did before, and admits the possibility of some affection instead of any unholy bias, caused by filthy lucre. Miss Vernon is shy about fixing her wedding day, but insinuates her marriage will not take place immediately. Florence is congratulating her, and intends sending a present when she returns to Paris, and I really think you can hardly do less than this, yourself, as you were always such a great admirer of Miss Vernon's. I hope you had the letters we forwarded; Charlie re-directed another for you this morning, as I had not quite made up my mind about writ-

ing to-day. We are all very tired of Nice; and the Lancasters are quite looking forward to being again in their house in Paris. Mrs. Lancaster was very unwell, indeed, for two days; in fact, they were on the point of sending for her Paris doctor, whom she has so much faith in, but she got better, and so avoided the necessity. She is, certainly, a wonderful woman. I don't think I ever met any one to equal her in rallying powers, but still she does not strike me as one who would be likely to live very much longer.

"Write again before we start from here, as I am still living in hopes of your joining our yachting expedition.

"Charlie joins me in all good wishes, but cannot, to-day, be bored with quill driving. (Lazy fellow!)

"Believe me, ever

"Your most affectionate friend,

"LUCY WESTON."

"Oh Rome! my country! city of the soul!
The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,
Lone mother of dead empires! and control
In their shut breasts their petty misery."

The day before the Westons and Lancasters left Nice, a letter, written in an unknown hand, bearing the Roman post mark, and addressed to Mrs. Weston, caused her some slight alarm from the nature of its contents—

"Rome.

"DEAR MRS. WESTON,

"Our mutual friend, Harold Trevelyan, has been laid low with an attack of Roman fever. At first I fancied he was in for a very serious illness, as he became, one night, dreadfully delirious, and his normal temperature rose to such an alarming degree, that I almost began to apprehend it would be all over with him. But I am happy to say on the following day he took a turn for the better, and I think it will now be safe for me to say there is no longer much to fear.

Harold, I observed, had been in low spirits for more than a week before he was attacked with this fever, which is due, I believe, in a great measure, to some little complication in his money affairs. Nothing much, I believe, but still I have no doubt it worried him into an illness. My reason in writing to you for him is, that he may know your address after you leave Nice, and also to enclose this card, which he wishes you to forward to Miss Vernon. Harold begged me not to unnecessarily alarm you, which I sincerely trust I have not done, and I may truthfully add, he is now quite on the high road to convalescence.

“ With kind regards,

“ Believe me,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ VINCENT GREY.”

Mrs. Weston read this letter to Florence, and at first both were rather impressed at

the gravity of Harold's illness, which they felt bound to confess had probably been caused by their mischievous underhand transactions. The deed, however, whatever might be its consequences, or the enormity of its misdemeanour was now irretrievable; and Mrs. Weston was not a woman given to lament over "spilt milk;" she was, therefore, the first to reconcile herself to matters as they now stood.

"His friend tells us he is much better," said she to Florence, "and quite out of danger; in another few days he will probably be all right. Rome is not a healthy place, and probably does not agree with him. It was very foolish of him to go there, and as Mr. Grey rightly observes, I dare say money matters were the real cause of his illness. Success has attended our efforts to separate them, for see! here is a token of our victory."

And Mrs. Weston held up the card Vincent Grey had enclosed, with triumph. It was

one of Harold's visiting cards, and upon it he had scrawled, in quavering, uncertain characters, quite unlike his ordinary steady, bold handwriting, as he lay sick in his bed, these few words—

"With Mr. Trevelyan's kind regards to Miss Vernon; and thanks for her photograph."

"What do you intend doing with it?" enquired Florence Lancaster, who could not crush a certain feeling of remorse, and a fear that they had been carrying matters a trifle too far.

"What I am going to do, Florence, will be the coping-stone of our achievements. This card, together with the first love letter Violet Vernon wrote to Harold, and which I have in my possession, will be put inside an envelope, fastened down, and given to that ugly little German student who sits next me sometimes at the *table d'hôte*, and goes to Rome to-morrow. I shall ask him to post it for me when he gets there, and when this is

accomplished, our schemes have ended. Harold, believing his fair one false, is laid low with Roman fever, and Miss Vernon, in another few days, will be eating ashes as it were bread, and mingling her drink with weeping. And all this has been accomplished with the pen. I quite agree with Lord Lytton, when he says, 'it is mightier than the sword,' because, with the pen, none can recognise the hand as it gives them that home thrust—the death blow."





CHAPTER II.

CAUGHT IN THE SNARE.

“ He who doth evil that good may come thereby,
Approves not what he doth; and yet
The grand rule forbids him, and
Counts his damnation just if he do it.”

MILTON.

MORE than two years have passed away since the events recorded in the previous chapter took place. Mr. and Mrs. Weston have been twice to America to visit the scenes of their youth, since we last took leave of them about to make a two months' yachting expedition in the Mediterranean.

The month is now November, and they have been for some time staying in London at the Langham Hotel, and Florence Lancaster is with them.

Mrs. Lancaster has been dead nearly eighteen months. General Lancaster is in Paris, but is expected to rejoin his daughter in a few days. It is the intention of all to remain in England till the end of the year, when the Westons think of going to Algiers. Florence and her father will, perhaps, go with them, unless some unforeseen event happens to prevent its accomplishment.

Mrs. Weston has not the least changed, and does not look a day older. She is as frivolous and worldly as ever, and her troubles (if she has any) evidently sit lightly upon her, that is to say, if one may judge from the animated face, which is ever ready to burst into peals of laughter at the most threadbare joke.

Her husband lets her do pretty much as she likes, provided he himself is not interfered with in his Club routine, where he occasionally indulges up to a late hour in *écarte*

or Unlimited Loo. He is the same good-natured man he was before, and is always willing to escort his wife and Florence to the theatres and other places of amusement, even when he himself feels intensely bored.

Florence, who still wears slight mourning for her mother, is also not much changed, but if she has at all it is a trifle for the better.

Perhaps about her movements there may be a more easy grace, and she seems to have been exercising her brains to some small advantage, by acquiring great conversational brilliancy.

She has the same sort of fashionable laugh as Mrs. Weston, is very conceited, quite as frivolous, and indulges in every sort of affectation. She has not lost that degree of cleverness she has always had of being able to assume a different character or style at a moment's warning, and so continue to sustain an acquired manner throughout the entire visit of an ordinary acquaintance, who will

leave her presence without a shadow of a suspicion of her behaviour being otherwise than what was natural to her. This gift makes her exceedingly amusing, and would make her an invaluable appendage to afternoon teas, garden parties, and early bread-and-butter balls, except that, unfortunately she very devoutly despised all such entertainments, and rarely graced any one of them with her presence.

Accustomed, as she had been, almost all her life to seeing a number of people, she could not exist without society, and as Mrs. Weston was the same as herself in this respect, they had made a point of looking up every friend or acquaintance who happened at this time to be either staying or residing in town; and there were few evenings which they spent at the hotel that they did not invite some one to their little *diners intimes*. Altogether, they knew a good many people, and as may be supposed foremost on their

visiting list was their elderly and rather uninteresting friend, Miss Trevelyan, who, I fear, was only tolerated on account of Harold, who had come over from Ireland to spend his long winter leave with his aunt.

Miss Trevelyan has taken a great fancy to Florence. The girl's bright manners and ready wit, together with her brilliant little songs, please and amuse this rather stern-natured old lady, and Florence has good reasons, depend upon it, for thus graciously acceding to the old maid's whims and foibles. She has on more than one occasion accepted a drive with Miss Trevelyan, wreathing her face in smiles the whole time she listened to the long rigmaroles which she had consented to endure, but returning to the hotel so awfully bored as to suggest fainting at every extra word she forced herself to utter, and good for naught beyond spending the remainder of the evening on the sofa, wafting perfumes to her olfactory nerves by the

fluttered breath of her downy fan, till she fairly fatigued herself by the very exercise of these consummate affectations.

* * * * *

Harold Trevelyan is now a captain in one of the Hussar regiments, at this time stationed in India. He is with the *depôt*, and does not expect to be sent abroad till he goes with the next draft, which is not likely to happen for some months.

He, too, has not much changed. Perhaps a very keen physiognomist might discover a little more inclination to bitterness in the expression of his mouth, and there is rather a sterner look in his eyes than was to have been seen in the frank, kind ones which we recollect to have been Harold's before. His figure is stouter and more robust, and in his conversation there is a little conceit and contempt, which his lady admirers may put down to cavalry swagger if they please, but

which I fear takes its cue from a heart which has lost its faith in feminine sincerity.

“Harold has become so much more a man of the world than he used to be,” Mrs. Weston had remarked the first time she saw him. “He is so well up to the high-water mark in all the doings of society, more like what he was, in fact, in the days before his extravagant folly.”

“I thought him insufferably conceited,” replied Florence, laughing, to whom the remark had been made.

“He did little else beside pulling his moustaches, and make that tiresome exclamation of ‘Oh, really!’ to all our airy talk the whole time he was here. He has certainly learnt to ‘put on side,’ as they call it. I felt quite inclined to ask him if it were one of the Queen’s regulations for officers to limit their vocabulary, and to use only blank cartridge when engaged with ladies.”

“All his acquired mannerism will go off in

a day or so, Florence, dear," said Mrs. Weston. "Another exchange of visits will soon thaw the thin ice of his conventionalism and bring old Harold back into the still waters of intimate friendship towards us both."

* * * * *

A month after this conversation between Mrs. Weston and Florence had taken place, they were dining and spending a quiet evening by themselves, with Miss Trevelyan and Harold, which they had got quite into the habit of constantly doing, making Mr. Weston call for them on his way back from the Club.

It is after dinner, and they have gathered round the fire in Miss Trevelyan's drawing-room, which is the usual thing to do after a meal in the winter time.

Florence has just been called upon to sing one or two of her bright little songs which are always so welcomed by the old lady, and

Harold has gone to open the piano and light candles for her, whilst Mrs. Weston is pulling out some wool from a work basket she has brought with her, for the purpose of showing Miss Trevelyan a new stitch in the knitted woollen shawl she is making. The old lady is by no means a very apt pupil, and the very simple way in which the wool is thrown over the needles to produce the intricate result which so much took her fancy seems to be drifting farther and farther from her slow comprehension.

"I like to see those two together, they are so well suited to one another," she remarked, with a wink at Mrs. Weston, and drawing her chair closer to hers, apparently with the intention of seeing better how the stitch was done, but really for the purpose of adding in an undertone—

"I wish Harold would marry Miss Lancaster. Poor fellow, I believe he loves her, but is not certain of its being returned."

“There, I must beg to differ from you, Miss Trevelyan, the fault is on your nephew’s side; at least, I know Florence was very much in love with him two years ago at Nice, but his affections were quite given to another at that time.”

“Indeed, Mrs. Weston, you surprise me; he never told me a word about it. Was this other love of his an heiress also?” enquired Miss Trevelyan, slightly frowning.

“No, she was at the time Miss Lancaster’s companion. I believe he was rather disappointed in this girl afterwards, and will never now mention her name. Please don’t appear to know anything about all this, or he will fancy I gossip to you about his love affairs.”

“Aunt, may I take a chair into the conservatory?” interrupted Harold. “Miss Lancaster fancies she would like to stay in there, and examine your plants?”

“Amuse yourselves in any way you please,

only be careful not to brush against the flowers. They are almost too crowded for any display of taste, I must get Saunders to take some of them out to-morrow," said the old lady sternly, annoyed at this interruption, which had come in the midst of her conversation about her nephew, and his voice had taken her rather by surprise.

The conservatory, which was not very large, communicated with the drawing-room by means of folding glass doors, and these could be entirely hidden from view if desired by drawing the warm curtains across them, which were placed on the inside. This, however, was seldom done, as Miss Trevelyan generally preferred the sight of this little peep at her flowers; and as she burnt candles in her drawing-room, and rarely lit the gas, it was only on the occasions when she used the latter that these curtains were drawn.

During the winter months, the conservatory was heated to its required temperature,

which not only assisted in warming her drawing-room, but likewise caused a fragrant odour to pervade the whole of it.

Mr. Saunders, the man that Miss Trevelyan employed once a week to attend to her flowers, was quite what might be termed a scientific floriculturist, or rather a flower maniac. Mr. Saunders made it his business to study all the publications on the latest varieties of plants, and he would himself occasionally enrich his fellow men by imparting his own experience in the way of a few trifling discoveries, which he would send for insertion to the editor of that little journal on horticulture, entitled "The Gardener." But whatever may have been his foibles, Miss Trevelyan's plants certainly thrived under his care. Perhaps, one of the chief reasons of his success lay in his determination throughout all cases of disease, to attack the root of the offender, and if it were possible, to lay *this*, as well as the decaying stem, beneath

the scrutiny of his gaze through a powerful magnifier. The invigorating and strengthening virtues contained in the property or properties of one sort of mould, or the combination of several, and their action on the interior economy of plants, he had made quite a specialty ; as he considered this knowledge of understanding the ingredients which were necessary to support life as the grand secret in preserving healthy plants, and in doctoring the sickly. Mr. Saunders was in fact a flower philosopher. I am not competent to judge of his theories, and must therefore leave this to the decision of others ; but there was certainly nothing very irrational in his conjecture, that the treatment of plants should be identical with all other living things. And that as a bird fancier varied his seed and green food for his aviary ; and change of diet and air were likewise essential to human health and happiness ; whilst a physic in the days of illness was prescribed by a professor of

medicine, which tallied with the nature of the disease — so did *he* consider himself quite a doctor in healing the sickness of plants, by prescribing a different remedy when they presented signs of decay, whilst in the apparent enjoyment of sufficient water, light, air, heat and soil, which he had hitherto regarded as adequate to the nature and requirements of his floral patient. Mr. Saunders was extremely averse to the frequent use of his knife, the common practice of which, he asserted, did as much injury, by weakening the plant, as the erroneous, but now extinct habit of bleeding did to the generation of our forefathers. Consequently, if there was a fault Miss Trevelyan had to find in this strange man, it was in the growth of her flowers, which limited the space in her conservatory for viewing them to a very narrow paved way. All her remonstrances on this point were useless ; for when at a loss for any other argument, he would vow that the

flowers felt as much pain in *their* way, when they were cut, as *we* do when we lose a limb, and all that she could get him to accede to was to remove the ones that became too large to his extensive nursery gardens, and to replace them with others of smaller dimensions.

“How delicious it is in here!” said Florence, seating herself on the chair, which Harold at length succeeded in placing on a little spare place in the crowded conservatory. “What a luxury it is having a house like this in Town. I love flowers, and should like to live in their midst always. Their perfume is one of the few things on this earth which gives us a foretaste of Heaven.”

“And you may include poetry among the few, Miss Lancaster, for what flowers are to the senses, poetry is to the soul.”

“Now, Captain Trevelyan, please don’t drift into these high sentiments, or you will soon soar above me. I really can’t go beyond

the flowers this evening. They are quite divine enough for me."

"And yet, it was you who first mentioned Heaven, Miss Lancaster."

"So I did, but I really have no wish to go there just at present, more especially when I am in such a little earthly paradise as this, and able to ask you any amount of absurd questions. Tell me something about Ireland, and what you do with yourself at the *depôt*?"

"I fear you won't find my movements there very interesting," replied Harold, smiling.

"Oh, never mind! anything to keep you out of the clouds. Describe the routine of your life."

"Well, until quite lately I have been very studious, working hard at my subjects to pass through the Staff College. But just before I came away, we had no end of fun, as there are plenty of balls and amusements

going on in Dublin, besides no end of pretty Irish girls willing to flirt with you."

"But you used not to care much about women, in a usual way. Do you really like them now?"

"Of course I do. What can a man do better than pass away his time looking into the heavenly eyes of woman?"

Florence made no answer, but lapsed into a dreamy silence, whilst Harold gazed down on her in his endeavour to discover whether she had been sensitive to the delicate compliment he meant her to take personally.

How pretty she looked this evening, he thought, surrounded by the delicate beauty of the flowers, with their green leaves making such a soft easy background against her pale pink dress, which was elaborately trimmed with lace. Her pose was so graceful. Her little arts and graces so well became the fragile, supple figure of this girl, enhanced by the beauty and perfume of the conser-

vatory, with the soft dim light which entered through the open door of the drawing-room beyond. All this assisted in lending such a refinement to her whole being, that it could hardly fail to exercise a certain spell upon him.

“ Did this woman still love him ? ” he asked himself.

Mrs. Weston had told him repeatedly at Nice that she loved him, but were her sentiments changed in the two years that had elapsed since then ? Mrs. Weston had not once alluded to this old subject since he had come from Ireland. But then, why should she ? seeing what a bad reception it had met with from him before.

She had kept quite silent in all that bore reference to that time of flirtation, and Violet's name had never once been named by either Florence or her friend. It had been only from his aunt that any pressure (if pressure it could be called) had come, and he

knew nothing would give *her* so much pleasure as a matrimonial alliance between himself and Florence Lancaster. Nay, Miss Trevelyan had abused him that very morning for his comparative indifference towards such an attractive, rich, pretty *parti*. To his aunt, then, Harold knew Florence was all that could be desired, and he was fain obliged to confess to himself that she was a girl who possessed those rare qualities in wit and beauty which must invariably bring with them a host of admirers, and which are destined to be ever the shining lights in society. But when he came to consider her in the light of his wife, the being in whose society he would wish to pass the greater portion of each day ; to find pleasure in his companionship ; to console him in his trials ; to sympathise, love, honour and esteem him, as he would desire to do equally to her—then, thinking of all these things, Harold sighed—it was in the excitement, clamour, and effervescence that

Florence would alone shine. In society, she would be its idol, the star in all its *ré-unions*, and the centre of attraction in all its assemblies. Her presence would afford a pleasure to every one, save, when by herself, in her own home, she was with—her husband.

He knew it, he felt it, he was conscious of all this ; and yet, as he looked back two years, and thought of the sweet, gentle face, and the deep, thoughtful eyes of *her* who had burst his heart by her cold insincerity, her broken faith, her violated vows—when he looked back on all this, it was almost with an exultation that he regarded the freedom of his present desperation, which no longer cared for love, nor could give affection ; which no longer either sought or claimed devotion, nor yearned one jot for that sympathy with his inner feelings, which he had once so longed for with all the passionate earnestness of his determined nature. Vain, empty dreams !

wrecked hopes ! attractive fables conjured up in his idle hours ! A fool was he to expect the realization of the least one of these empty fancies ! And what was there in the failure of all this to make him fill his cup with bitterness, and drink *this* to its dregs during his remaining years ?

Was he justified in allowing the iron to penetrate his soul, because his heart held nothing but the wraiths of these day-dream memories ? Away with such folly ! He was young ; his life was still before him ! He had hitherto been too willing to imbibe the romantic ravings of poets. But from henceforth he would become an enthusiast (if an enthusiast he needs must be) in that practical philosophy which monopolises all the coarser and least delicate of the senses. He would abandon all his former thoughts, seeing it was fatal to all happiness to think of anything beyond the sensual pleasures of this life which would come within his grasp.

He would live for the day, in the hour, and with the moment. He would sip the honey from every flower that sweetened his life-path, and after carefully drowning every bitterness in the river of Lethe, he would take a deep draught from the nectar of pleasure.

Such were the wild thoughts which coursed through Harold Trevelyan's brain with that electric rapidity of motion which makes the pace of the pen, in attempting to describe them, what a mail coach is to an express train.

Probably, from such meditations as these running riot in the mind of one, and the effect of the flowers upon the other, we may account for the silence which came over them in the conservatory.

Florence was the first to break it, and, turning her eyes full on Harold, with an expression in them of the most tender solicitude, she said—

“I hope you will not be offended with me

for making a very personal remark, but I was thinking a little while ago what a much happier man you seem to be now than when I first knew you, Captain Trevelyan."

Her voice startled him, and the memory her words recalled for one moment paralysed him, touching, as they did, the same lost chord in his life, which he had just been soliloquizing over.

It seemed to him as if she had been reading his thoughts, and had seen his determination to brush away the cloud which endeavoured to veil his happiness, and so had discovered the gay mask he had lately assumed, to hide from the vulgar gaze his true feelings. "Was this last remark of hers ironical?" he enquired of himself, as, eyeing her suspiciously, he replied—

"I was rather under pecuniary difficulties at that time, Miss Lancaster, which weighed me down, and prevented all freedom of action. Besides, you forget that my object in going

to Nice was to pick up strength after the breakdown of my health in India."

"Do you think you will have to go to that dreadful place again, or will your regiment be soon coming home?"

He was relieved now, because he saw she had not guessed his mind, as he had been so foolishly fancying, and, with more confidence than he had hitherto felt, Harold replied—

"It does not return before another five years. I expect to be obliged to join it in about nine months, unless I succeed before then in getting some staff appointment. My aunt does not at all like the thoughts of my going back to India, and is doing her utmost to see if nothing can be obtained through some of her influential friends; if not, I know it is her wish I should retire from the service, and live with her, or—marry."

"And why don't you do as your aunt wishes?"

"What, leave the army?"

“ Perhaps,” replied Florence; “ but what I meant was, why don’t you—marry ? ”

She threw out these last words with a modesty which suggested the fear of their being put down to a personal motive in asking them, and the readiness with which Harold grasped at and availed himself of this opportunity her question afforded him, surprised, though it did not disconcert her.

“ Marry ! ” he repeated softly, and in a tone of subdued humility, “ Aye, why would I not marry, could I only feel certain of her whom I long for ! ”

Was he thinking of Violet, or did this last sentence bear reference to herself ? queried Florence. Finding he got no reply, he put it down to bashfulness, and continued—

“ When you first knew me at Nice, I could not afford to marry, however much I might have wished. My aunt was, at that time, making me a very meagre allowance, and I was only a lieutenant in a line regiment. Of

course, I find I have in the cavalry many more expenses to meet as I am now, than formerly ; in fact, I could not at all manage to live in my present regiment were it not for the increased liberality of my aunt, who, as long as I continue to hold my head up in the world, is always kind. She has lately promised to do much more for me if I will take a wife whom she approves, and, as I have said, either retire, or confine myself as much as possible to home service." Here he hesitated, and Florence, looking down, commenced to pluck into tiny pieces a scarlet geranium which lay on her lap. " You and I are not any longer very new acquaintances," he went on, gently touching her arm ; " we are friends, great friends, but I long to ask you to be something more, because I have learnt lately that I—I love you. You are not the first and only woman who has found favour in my eyes ; I have loved before, I honestly confess it. But I regard you as my best, and most lasting

affection, because, in the calmer moments of my more mature manhood, I ask you to be my—my—*wife*.”

“ My dear Captain Trevelyan, you really do me a great honour. I mean, it is most kind of you to tell me all this. But you take me by surprise, you do, indeed ! I never for one moment before now, fancied you cared the least for me, in what I mean this sort of way.”

“ I did not at one time, Florence ; that, too, I will frankly confess. But my friendship has increased to love since I have known and seen so much of you during the past month. Believe me, each time I have been with you I have been sensible of an enchantment in your presence which I was too dull or stupid—what you will—to be conscious of before, in those days when I sometimes conceitedly flattered myself that you cared a little bit for me. Was I wrong ? Speak, dearest Florence, only speak, and I will hang upon your words, if they give me joy.”

And she did speak. Raising her head slowly, she faced him, with eyes which in some wonderful way appeared to have a dual expression in them. Soft, indeed, were they, and melting, as they could not fail to be, with their long black silken fringes ; but beneath all this there was a hidden light, a triumphant glitter, and Harold, as he met her gaze, felt instantly conscious of something sinister and treacherous in her glance, which resembled that of the cobra when it gloats at its paralysed rabbit victim before finishing the fearful suspense by the final spring.

He stood as one petrified by the thoughts of his great mistake, as he read the refusal in her eyes, and the fiendish victory written in their glances.

Again he had been entrapped, gulled, caught like a ram by his horns in a thicket, and sacrificed on woman's votive altar—*de-lusion*.

A mad confusion raged within his brain,

and left his imagination to run riot till it brought him to a Lybia, into the presence of a Gorgon, and forced him to hear words which stung him like a lash of scorpions.

Whilst she, with all that incongruity of thought there was between them, was endeavouring to pose with all the ease, composure, and self-possession of the consummate actress which she could so naturally assume to befit the *rôle* she intended to play before him, of a Tragedy Queen.

“ Captain Trevelyan, you have been honest with me ; it is my turn now to be honest with you,” said she, rising from her chair and facing Harold, who stood pale and haggard as a criminal before the black-capped judge. “ Two years ago,” continued she, mellowing her tones to suit the requirements of her words, “ I loved you ; aye, loved you, Harold, as perhaps a woman only once in her life can love ; at least, all the love that it was possible in my nature to feel, I felt then for you. As much

as it was within the boundaries of modesty, pride, and the position I held of being the only child of a new generation destined to bear the distinguished name, and inherit the fair patrimony of my forefathers, I showed you the love my soul felt for you. Whether you were fully aware of it or not is nothing to me now ; I only challenge you with indifference ; I do not accuse you of scorn. You loved another. You loved her whom I brought with me from the school where we had been school-fellows, though never friends, and out of sheer pity for her destitute position, I made her my companion. This girl, this Violet Vernon, whom you so doted on, that all else you regarded as dross to gold when you looked into her eyes, despised your love and jilted you."

'He writhed at her words, like a bruised worm after a crush from the foot. Even now he could not stand by and calmly witness his once cherished idol hurled from the pedestal

of his ideal love and dashed in his teeth by the raging spite of an envious woman.

“Pity me, pity me, Florence! For God’s sake, as you know all this, be silent,” he cried, with the appealing tones of agony and desperation.

“Pity!” she ejaculated, sternly. “No; I leave the *pity* to Violet, Harold. The part I have to play is *revenge*. When I loved you, did you show me pity? Did you give me a kind word, an affectionate look? Even the warm pressure of the hand in those days would have sent the blood coursing through my veins with unspeakable joy and gladness, had it but come from *you*. But all your love was for her; she monopolised all your thoughts. She took possession of your whole feelings. She absorbed your whole being. Aye, she took the entire love of the one man I then cared for, and in the selfishness of your love for her, you never once thought that you widowed mine. I resolved then, and from

henceforth, to steel my heart against all inward emotion. To become again what I had been before I had known *you*, and what I still am—a heartless flirt, a trifler, a coquette. Do you know what being all this means? It is that I would cheat God out of His own divine inheritance—a man's soul—and then treat this possession as a bauble, a plaything! What Heaven fights with Eternity to attain, we women win sometimes with a smile, and then disdain our celestial conquest. You think all this hateful, Harold? But I am not among the worst who do all this. And my acts are but as the thoughtless pleasures of a child compared to the perjured love of her whom you once idolised. This Violet Vernon, who cared not one straw about your love—I know it, Harold, because she herself told me,” she added, with a scornful laugh.

“She heeded not your love letters, and she has never once wasted one thought on the

throes of your wounded heart. And now you come and offer *this* to me—withered—which she in its freshness scorned. Do you suppose that I, Florence Lancaster—I, who can boast of having had a score of hearts, with their coronets of love, at my feet, will now stoop to accept yours, shattered and bereft of its one great adornment? You must look on me as a fool, Harold, if you think this. The love I once bore you I have long ere this blotted out. It no longer exists; it has become a thing of nought. I have defaced its landmark, though I cannot quite eradicate all traces of it from my memory. But I now neither love you, nor can I ever again love any one else. My marriage, whenever it may take place, can and must be only *de convenance*. In one word, then, Harold Trevelyan, you have my answer—you are *refused!*”



CHAPTER III.

CASTLE MANVERS.

*"L'on n'aime bien qu'une seule fois ;
C'est la première !
Les amours qui suivent sont moins
Involontaires."*

LA BEUYÈRE.

IN the beautifully wooded county of Westlandshire, ten miles from the nearest railway station or town of any importance, and with only the few cottages and houses constituting the picturesque village of Crookly for its nearest neighbours, stands the fine old country seat known as Castle Manvers.

The house, surrounded by an extensive deer park, is skirted on the south of this by the pretty winding tributary called the Carp,

which affords amusement to the inmates of the Castle in the way of boating and fishing.

On the eastern and western sides of the deer park are the entrance gates, which conduct you through a most delicious avenue of elm trees, nearly half a mile in extent, and brings you to a third gate, which separates the park from the garden.

The immediate grounds attached to the Castle do not extend over more than five acres, and in this is included the flower and vegetable gardens, together with the stables and various outside buildings.

The Castle and its deer park have been in the Manvers' family for upwards of three centuries, and many acres of land besides had at one time been attached to this ancestral property. This had, however, been disposed of after the same manner it had been come by ; that is to say, piece by piece it had been accumulated by the prudent Manvers, and bit by bit, it had been disposed of by the

foolish ones until only the house and deer park, which came within the legal clasp of a strict entail, remained to the succeeding generations.

The original landmarks beyond the park had by this means become entirely effaced from the earth, save one small plot, rather over two acres in extent, which might be likened to the brand snatched from the burning, as this patch of ground would not have been worth mentioning had it not been from the fact of its having been converted into a family cemetery by Mr. Abraham Manvers, grandfather to the present owner, who had endowed it with a sufficiency for its adornment and preservation, and, in order still further to insure the continuance of his hobby, had included the cemetery in the strict entail of the park and Castle.

As there is a more detailed description of this cemetery and the curious name it bore, appended to our last chapter, I will say no

more about it here, as it was a spot seldom, if ever, visited by any of the present inhabitants of the Castle, and was so completely buried from view by surrounding trees and shrubs as to almost entirely lose its identity to every one beyond the gardener in charge of the solitary graves, whose duty it was to mow the grass and attend to the trees, shrubs, and flowers which were planted there.

Mr. Robert Maitland Manvers, the present owner of Castle Manvers, has done much in the way of restoring the ancient architecture of the house, as well as improving and greatly altering the general aspect of its pleasure grounds; and the garden is now one of those wild, luxuriant labyrinths which are so truly refreshing from their rarity, in these days of excessive neatness and the monotony of the artificial taste displayed in the ribbon bordering of the bedding-out plants; which method of gardening may be most suitable

to public parks, cottage hospitals, lunatic asylums, hydropathic and homœopathic establishments, etc., but is hardly in accordance with one's ideas concerning a nobleman's or a gentleman's laid-out pleasure grounds, more especially when we see this artificial taste still more vulgarised in the small attempts of a similar kind, which are before every presumptuous little suburban villa, which now rear their heads everywhere on the outskirts of all our large and small towns. Flowers to be thoroughly enjoyed, that is to say, felt, as well as seen, require sufficient space for tree foliage, besides clusters of delicate shrubs ; and to cover a border with gay colours, without the variety of green which so blends and harmonises them to the eyes, denotes as *outré* a taste in the gardener, as it does in a woman when she arrays her human form divine in all the colours of the rainbow. In the grounds of Castle Manvers flowers grew and flourished

to perfection. Let it not be supposed there was the least lack of colour, when, after winding through pathways of yew and laurel (not clipped into the prevailing fashion of stiff hedges, but with their tops unshorn, gracefully growing whither Nature leads) you came upon an emerald lawn, smooth as a velvet pile, in the centre of which stands a fountain with four statues buried in ferns, and surrounding these are terra-cotta vases entwined with variegated ivy, containing scarlet geraniums, also partially hidden in ferns. And on either side of the fountain and lawn are arranged, on grass tiers, in a manner which is most pleasing and delightful to the senses, flowering and foliage shrubs intermixed with flowers, which has quite the appearance of a very beautifully arranged bouquet on a most gigantic scale. Coming out of the shrubberies and hedges of laurel and yew, this spot dawned on one like a peep into fairy land, or a nook snatched from the

groves of Eden. All that was needed to complete the illusion was the æsthetic presence of a Flora. Quitting the green sward we step into a little avenue of acacia trees, and so come to the broad gravel drive, which encircles Flora's bower, and terminates at the gate which divides the park from the garden. Before us is a heavy stone porch with an oak panelled door on the inside, which to-day is open, as the month is August and the weather is bright and warm. In fact, it is only when we compare the shortness of the days to the ones we have been enjoying during the previous months, that we are reminded we have "chill October" soon to look forward to, and that it is only the warmth of the mid-day sun which beguiles us away from remembering that summer is only bidding us a lingering farewell. At the side of the massive stone porch hangs the quaint old bell handle, which, as we pull it to-day, gives the same hearty, welcome

sound it did in the days of ancient Yule-tide, when the old English custom of roasting the ox and distributing unlimited flagons of sack to the honest and simple-minded peasant folk had been preserved up to a late period in the family, as one of the institutions which were inherited with the Manvers' title-deeds. The hall is quaintness itself, with its walls lined with the family portraits, which are surmounted with the heads of deer that have been bred in the park. There is a great charm about this old entrance hall, probably attributable to the absence of all assumption to antiquity. It stands a noble witness of ancestral greatness. It is stamped with the memories of old associations, and its mellow tints and hues defy all the spurious art of the "Queen Anne craze"—which is so unreal and effervescent in its spirit, so often exaggerated and absurd in taste, that it deserves to be brought into disrepute. For is it not damaging to genuine

art when nothing will satisfy these curiosity-collecting maniacs till they have peered into every chink and cranny, to fill their houses with the broken china and refuse from the ash heaps? Could but half the things which have exchanged hands under the magic name of *bric-à-brac*, tell their own histories, the fund of comic passages their pedigrees would unearth might swell the pages of "Punch" into twice the number of volumes we at present possess of our "London Charivari." The only sincere and genuine affection there can be for old things (I am not now referring to pieces of antiquity without family associations which are only suitable to museums) is, when we have known them in childhood, and greet them as old friends in our old age. It is then, indeed, that we have good reason to love them best. For in their associations they remind us of a *past*, and though that past may be a sad and mournful one, we yet love to remember it ; since it

brings us back to the days of our youth, and is as the silent lute of childish memories, which has been stored away in some tiny granary of our brain, and so become veiled with the dust and cobwebs of our cares. Its strings are broken as the knots and ties of childhood become severed in the necessities of manhood. It can now only reverberate to the tune of other days; it is now only an echo—but that echo is still sufficient to recall the loved memories of yore.

* * * * *

Having passed the threshold and hall of Castle Manvers, we open a door to the right which leads us to the drawing-room, and here we encounter our heroine, Violet Vernon.

She has been here some months, and has passed through several changes since we left her in lodgings at Ramsgate; but it was through her friend Mrs. Knight, who happened to be acquainted with the Manvers, that she

obtained her present position of governess to their two little girls. The novelty of independence in a lodging has long since subsided, since experience taught her that a solitary life was anything but conducive either to health or spirits ; moreover, she discovered several little disagreeables, which proceeded from her unprotected position, so that with the conjunctive persuasion of Mr. Daniel and Mrs. Knight, there was no great difficulty about making her decide to close with Mrs. Manvers' offer. Let it not be supposed her present life is one all *couleur de rose*. Far from it. She had much to submit to, which she disliked. Mrs. Manvers was by no means a pleasant woman, either to her husband or her household. She was selfish, indolent, and fashionable, grumbling at every day she spent in the country—which she abhorred—as so much of her life wasted. It was, therefore, seldom that she lost any opportunity which afforded

her the apology of an excuse to get away, whether her husband joined her or not, as she was perfectly indifferent to the fact of his finding the home more comfortable during her absence, or with her discontented presence.

Mrs. Manvers had little love for her children, because they had turned out girls, instead of boys, and this was a perpetual source of uneasiness to her, seeing that the property which was entailed only in the male line, would go after her husband, to his only brother, or he, failing to survive, to his eldest boy, a lad at this time of about fifteen years of age. She felt she never could forgive fortune for having bestowed on her only two detestable girls, whilst it had blessed her sister-in-law with four fine boys in succession. She felt and knew the decrees of fate to be immutable ; nevertheless, Mrs. Manvers looked forward during her lifetime to in some measure qualifying the legitimate

results by attempting to enforce a marriage when her daughters grew up, between one of them and their eldest cousin, Edward Manvers, the heir presumptive to the property. Robert Manvers, the present owner of the estate, was a most agreeable, pleasant man, with very cultivated tastes, and was one of the last people either to make difficulties, or to originate those domestic feuds which were so often raging between himself and his wife, and which to a looker-on appeared to be her very staff in life, since her pleasure seemed to consist in annoying and upsetting him in those small trifles which are so much harder to bear than calamities of real magnitude, since they are a never-ending worry in embittering the spirit, and destroying the patience; and given time to work long enough, will completely annihilate those amiable qualities which are such a *sine quâ non* to peaceful, contented happy wedlock. Equally as his wife loathed the country, did Mr.

Manvers enjoy it. It was almost unfortunate that a man of his calibre—who seemed so fitted in every way to shine in society, from his appearance, conversation, and manners—should yet be so devoted to seclusion. To him, living in a town meant misery, and perhaps he was never so thoroughly happy as, when left to himself, he would pore for hours together over some of the favourite volumes in his superb library, or else giving orders and personally superintending the commencement of some new display of taste in his garden. Everything in it that struck the eye as refined and original, proceeded from its owner, and even his experienced gardeners never demurred about executing his orders, but consented with alacrity to fulfil his instructions, being sure of their resulting to their own credit, as well as affording pleasure to their master. Robert Manvers was a popular man, and much respected by poor as well as rich in the

neighbourhood, and perhaps there were few in the world who would have cared to throw him an ill word, or do him an unfriendly action, save two inmates of his own household—namely, his wife and her maid Baines. The first of these loved to oppose him for opposition's sake, and the second, because though aware of the antipathy her master had against her, she was yet suffered to continue in her present capacity, as her mistress found her so invaluable as a maid (or at least had worked herself into believing it, which is much the same thing) that she refused to part with her. Baines had been in the family since Mrs. Manvers' marriage, and though her husband had never cared much about her, it had only been recently that he acquired quite a positive dislike towards her. Baines knew and felt this, and consequently bore a grudge against the one who had caused it, and though outwardly civil and amiable in her conduct, there yet

smouldered within her breast a malicious instinct which only waited a favourable opportunity to assert itself. The cause of her ill-feeling had happened in this wise. Before Violet Vernon came to Castle Manvers it had been one of Baines' duties to look after the children's wardrobes, and do all that was required in the way of repairing and altering. But she, taking her cue from the vulgar mind of her mistress—who she knew regarded a governess as only one degree better than an upper servant—had endeavoured to impose these wardrobe duties on Violet, and thereby placing her in the capacity of only a nursery governess, which had formed no part of the stipulation she had made with Mrs. Manvers. It was not likely, therefore, that Violet would calmly consent to having this thrust on her by Baines, and scorned in silent displeasure the impertinent insult. Mrs. Manvers observing that Violet's pride was considerably wounded in the matter,

and being, as we have already said, a woman with a mean and paltry disposition, forbore taking any active part in the affair, but secretly wished Baines would get the best of it, as the children's clothes were sometimes rather neglected during such times as when Mrs. Manvers would be visiting, as on such occasions she almost invariably went accompanied by her maid. Violet, besides, regarding this wardrobe duty as *infra dig*, as well as extremely irksome; being never at any time very fond of her needle, and feeling excessively nettled at the vulgar equality Baines endeavoured to establish between them, as well as at obtaining no redress from Mrs. Manvers in the way of a satisfactory answer to her complaint; determined that, if the matter were pushed farther, she would throw up the appointment.

Mrs. Manvers was unwilling to part with Violet, though not personally liking her, but she kept the children quieter, and appeared

to have more control over them than any one she had previously employed ; and her having suffered less annoyance from her little girls since Violet had been managing them, weighed heavily in the estimation of this selfish woman. But on the other hand she was no more willing to part with Baines, whom she regarded as her right hand, besides being her confidant as well as cringing counsellor, in all the petty differences which her mistress stirred up between her husband and herself. This domestic feud was at its present state of uncertainty, when it reached the ears of Mr. Manvers, who rarely interfered in any of the household arrangements—regarding them as matters which every man should leave entirely with his wife. In this affair, however, he considered himself quite justified in acting contrary to what his ideas had hitherto dictated ; and finding his little girls were quite sorrowing at the thoughts of having to part with Violet, towards whom they had already be-

come much attached, he resolved to take the matter into his own hands, and settle it one way or another. For this purpose he most judiciously enquired of each party the nature of their grievance, and became furious when he understood the indignity that had been offered to Violet. High words ensued between Mrs. Manvers and himself, in which he was overheard confining Miss Vernon's duties entirely to educational ones, and upbraiding his wife with many bitter invectives for countenancing a menial, who could offer any insult to a lady under his own roof, which he deemed precisely the same as if it had been done to any member of his family; and he was for giving Baines a severe reprimand, and orders of dismissal. To this part of it his wife indignantly refused, and so betook herself to the last resource, namely, a compromise. It was therefore arranged that in future the housemaid should attend to the children's wardrobes, and

a dressmaker be engaged from the village, to come at such times when anything special required the hands of a more experienced person.

We found Violet in the drawing-room, where she has been reading the story of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" to two little girls of eight and twelve. Edith and Maud Manvers are pretty children, with sunny, fair hair and angel faces. The youngest is sitting on Violet's knee, and has been constantly interrupting her reading by her enquiring remarks.

"Why did they beat poor Uncle Tom?" enquired the child, fixing her big blue eyes on Violet.

"Because he was a slave, Maud. Do you know what the meaning of being a slave is, dear?"

"Yes, I know, Miss Vernon," interrupted the elder girl. "It is a black man or woman who can be bought or sold. Poor Uncle Tom was sold often enough."

“One need not always be black, Edith, to be a slave,” remarked Violet. “There were such things as white slaves formerly.”

“Could papa buy a black slave now, if he wished?” enquired small Maud, in her piping treble.

“In some parts of the world he might, but not in England, or in any place which belongs to England, because they have all been made free; and this little book had a very great deal to do with their freedom, because it made all the good people in England feel so sorry for them.”

“Don’t forget to give some of the credit to poor old Wilberforce, Miss Vernon,” said a kind voice, and, looking up, the children saw their father, looking through the window from the garden at them.

He is a tall, good-looking man, about forty years of age, with dark brown hair, whiskers and moustache.

“Is mamma not down yet?” enquired he

of the children, kissing Maud, and commencing to stroke her fair hair. "Which of you will run upstairs and ask her for one of my cards. I want to pay a visit to our new vicar, Miss Vernon, and shall just have time to do it before lunch. Edith," added he, turning to his eldest child, "perhaps you had better go, for I can see Maud is anxious to regain her position on Miss Vernon's knee. I suppose she wishes to hear more about little Ada Sinclair."

"Have *you* read the book, then, papa?"

"Yes, of course I have, and should like to hear it again, Maud, if you will tell me about it in the garden instead of inside. It is such a lovely day, Miss Vernon, that it seems almost a pity to keep the children indoors."

"So I think," replied Violet, giving a yearning glance at the inviting grounds, "but Mrs. Manvers objects to the children being much in the sun."

"Oh, nonsense! Put on your hats and

come out, Miss Vernon. A little air will do you all good."

Here Edith, who had been sent to her mother for the visiting card, returned with the following message—

"Mamma says, papa, she won't be down before lunch, so she can't get your cards till then, as they are locked up in the *écritoire*, over there," said the child, pointing to a piece of furniture placed at the farther end of the room, which corresponded to this name.

Mr. Manvers looked annoyed, but was evidently accustomed to unamiable conduct on the part of his wife, and soon reconciled himself to existing circumstances.

"Never mind," said he, "I dare say I shall have time this afternoon. We will take a stroll about the grounds instead. The deer were up at the near corner five minutes ago, Maud, and your two little ones were skipping about the herd as gay as two young larks. Let us come and see if they are there now."

When they had put on their hats, Violet and her pupils joined Mr. Manvers on the gravel walk, and, taking Maud by the hand, he conducted them to the gate separating the deer park from the garden. Edith skips along in front, expending her superfluous energy in a chase after a white butterfly, who has dodged her about from flower to shrub, till she feels quite inclined to give it up in despair.

“Children, you must bring all the roses you can to your cheeks, or you will need them sadly when you are grown up,” said Mr. Manvers, smiling at Edith, who has given up her pursuit, and returned with cheeks like moss-rose buds. Edith is a precocious, practical child for her age, and has a very keen perception.

“Shall we be always pale when we are grown up, like Miss Vernon, papa?” enquired she thoughtfully, putting one of those pertinent questions by which children so often make grown people feel awkward.

"Miss Vernon's cheeks are not pale," said her father. "She has almost as much colour in them as you have, Edith."

"Perhaps, now, papa, because she is blushing. But she was pale before."

"No she was not," broke in Maud, quite indignant with her sister for saying anything disparaging about Violet's appearance, her face having, from the first, rather charmed the infantine fancy of both little girls. "I think Miss Vernon very pretty, and we love her very much, don't we, papa?" added she, appealing to her father to support her in her opinions.

"Yes, Maud, we all like her," answered her father, laughing, "but I dare say Miss Vernon doesn't always like us, and I am sure she doesn't care for you when you're naughty."

"Papa, why can't Miss Vernon marry?" enquired Edith, who had been revolving this query in her mind for her past five silent minutes, but had been unable to solve it to her own satisfaction.

"I don't know what you mean by *can't*, Edith. Perhaps you meant to say why doesn't she marry, which is a very foolish question to ask, seeing that I am not acquainted with Miss Vernon's thoughts," replied her father.

"But I didn't mean to say that, papa," persisted Edith, "but mamma told me governesses hardly ever married."

"If others entertain the same opinion of Miss Vernon that I do, I should say she wouldn't have much difficulty," rejoined Mr. Manvers, bitterly.

"Then you think Miss Vernon will be married, papa?"

"Certainly, if she cares to be."

"Mamma said the other day, every woman wished to be married," said Edith, unwilling to let the subject drop.

"Every woman like herself, I suppose she meant to say. Mamma, I am afraid, forgets sometimes that all people's feelings are not born in her own nutshell," added Mr.

Manvers, sarcastically. Then wishing to change the subject, he remarked, "I don't see the deer anywhere. They must have gone off to their favourite spot near the bouquet of oaks in the western corner."

But Edith was not to be diverted from her previous conversation by anything her father might have to say about the deer, so she again enquired—

"Would you like to marry Miss Vernon, papa?"

"Don't ask such silly questions. I have mamma," was the stern rejoinder.

"But if you hadn't mamma, papa, would you *then*?"

"Surely, Mr. Manvers, that deer lying on the grass must be ill, or it would never stay so long in the same place, and away from the rest of the herd," broke in Violet, desperately catching at anything as a change of topic from Edith's uncomfortable personal remarks, and spying something at a little distance off

in the park which resembled the animals referred to.

"Perhaps they have been fighting, and one has been wounded. Shall we walk up to it and see?" suggested Mr. Manvers, opening the gate they had been leaning against.

On approaching the spot, they perceived a fallow deer lying full length on the green sward, and not making the least effort to move, not even to raise its head, when they had come quite close to it. Mr. Manvers decided it must be ill.

"Ill, papa!" exclaimed both little girls, in sympathetic tones of voice. "Oh, poor thing! poor thing! Do you think it will die, papa? Miss Vernon, do come and pat the hair, it is so soft. I hope it won't die," continued they, kissing the animal, and stroking its back.

"Take care, Miss Vernon, don't stand too much in front of its head. They are treacherous things sometimes, and like taking a mean advantage."

“ I don’t think there is much danger about this one,” replied Violet, who had been patting the deer’s head, “ I see it has been fighting. There is blood on one of the antlers, and the other is broken.”

She had barely finished speaking, when Mr. Manvers’ favourite dog, “ Rock,” a large black retriever, bounded towards them, and the deer, with that instinctive timidity towards the canine tribe, sprang suddenly to her legs, and bounded away with the fleet speed of a race horse ; but in its unexpected movements, knocking Violet down, and, at the same time, badly grazing the arm of the hand which, just before, had been stroking its head.

“ Hang the awkward beast ! That dog deserves to be shot ! ” broke from Mr. Manvers, as he sprang towards Violet, and assisted her to rise, whilst “ Rock,” who had been the whole cause of the catastrophe, was engaged endeavouring madly to overtake the deer as it

scampered along to rejoin the rest of the herd, which were quite at the other side of the park. "I hope you are not hurt Miss Vernon?" enquired Robert Manvers, regarding Violet with much concern.

"No, I think not; perhaps more startled than hurt," returned she, looking very pale, and attempting to smile and thank him, as he still retained possession of her hand.

"But what is this? Your arm must be hurt, for there is blood on your sleeve," he remarked, examining her wrist near where the antlers of the deer had torn her white batiste sleeve, and grazed the skin of her arm beneath.

"Is poor dear Miss Vernon hurt?" inquired the little girls, who had recovered from the fright they too had received, and were now looking into their father's face with quite anxious expressions on their usual happy ones, whilst he gently tied his white pocket-handkerchief round the injured arm.

“Nothing much, I hope, my dears,” replied he, just as the lunch gong was heard sounding from the Castle; so he added, “Would it not be better for you both to run back, or mamma will be in the dining-room wondering what has become of us all!”

The children did as they were bid, leaving Violet to follow slowly behind with Mr. Manvers, as a sick faintness had come over her after the rather stunning effect of the blow. She is easily upset, as she is no longer the robust, healthy Violet, with the awkward figure, that we remember her having at Tyler Grange. She is slight now, and gives one the idea of having a somewhat delicate constitution, as her face is generally rather pale. She walks back to the house on the strong arm of Mr. Manvers, who seems most distressed at the occurrence of the accident, and thinks he cannot show enough how much he is annoyed.

The children had given their mother a

description of the adventure with the deer, so that Mrs. Manvers had time to prepare her remarks when her husband and Violet took their seats at the table for lunch. She is a stout woman, about forty years of age, rather pigeon-breasted, and holding herself always very erect, which gives a certain stiff primness to her appearance.

“I wish you wouldn’t interfere with the children and Miss Vernon, Robert. All this silly nonsense would never have happened if you had something better to do than hanging about the place idle all day. Miss Vernon, I think I told you before that I did not wish the children to be so much out in the sun. It burns and spoils their complexions, besides getting them into such coarse, rough country habits. Look at their faces now,” continued she, scanning Edith’s and Maud’s faces disparagingly, which were blooming from their late run.

“What nonsense you talk, Marian,” re-

joined her husband, much irritated, "I would sooner see them with burnt faces than sickly ones."

"Yes, burnt faces and broken limbs, I should say would be quite in your line," returned Mrs. Manvers, spitefully, "I'm sure it's a wonder their both escaping being hurt by the deer this morning, and your arm is only a mere scratch, is it not, Miss Vernon," enquired she, in a careless unsympathising tone of voice.

"George!" said Mr. Manvers, to the manservant, as he helped himself to some bread, "I suppose you told the coachman we should want the carriage at three o'clock?"

"Yes, sir, but mistress says she won't require it," replied the man.

"I have counter-ordered it, Robert. I don't feel it safe to leave the children alone in the midst of so many perils," rejoined his wife.

"It is quite a new phase in your life, Marian, this wonderful anxiety about the

children's safety," answered her husband, bitterly. "You can tell the coachman he can still bring round the carriage, George, at the hour named. I shall go for a drive and take the children, as you appear to have changed your mind, Marian," and, with this decision, Robert Manvers rose hastily from the table and left the room.





CHAPTER IV.

THE CONFESSION.

"She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek,
She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like Patience on a monument
Smiling at grief."

TWELFTH NIGHT.

TIME passed smoothly and monotonously with Violet at Castle Manvers. Beyond the daily walk or drive with the children there was not much change in the day's routine. Mr. Manvers spent more than half his time among his books in his study, and his wife never appeared before lunch, and usually spent the afternoons in her private boudoir upstairs.

The drawing-room was seldom used, save by Violet and the children, who, unless disturbed by an occasional visitor to the Castle, had the room pretty much to themselves, and Violet would either relate some story to her pupils, or play and sing on the piano by way of amusing them. Sometimes the music induced Mr. Manvers to leave his study, and by way of the little excuse of taking a romp with the children, he indulged himself in a short hour of Miss Vernon's society. There is something about Violet which attracts him. The deep, thoughtful look in her eyes, with her pensive face, and gentle demeanour—above all, a certain mysterious melancholy which pervades her actions, tastes, and ideas, and which seems to create a halo of romance about her, is more than sufficient to arouse curiosity and interest in the nature of a man so æsthetically disposed as is Robert Manvers. Many and often are the times he has racked his brains to discover what the sad

secret in her young life could be, but had never dared venture to make his inward inquiries known to herself. For, with all the delicacy of his feelings, he shrank from unearthing that "weeping willow," which he felt was entirely nourished by the sadness of her heart. He noticed it by the books she loved best, the songs she sang with most feeling, and the treasured passages from prose and verse which she extracted from her favourite authors, and made them kin in sympathy with her grief. Robert Manvers felt that he, too, had his cross to bear, and often found it a sore and weary burden, which hung like a millstone about his neck. He had never loved his wife, neither had his marriage been one of his own seeking. It had all been arranged by his father, and, as a supple limbed youth, with the pliant ways and immature mind of eighteen, he had plighted his troth and led to the hymeneal altar the girl whom paternal aggrandizement decreed should become his

wife. He had thought it a fine thing, and something to be proud of, in those days of his happy careless youth, to be engaged to a girl two years older than himself, who had plenty of money, with sufficient good looks, and found great favour in his father's eyes. Where is the lad who would think of rejecting the tempting bait of leaving school, of becoming his own master, and jumping into the important shoes of manhood in a day? If there be any who would refuse such paternal munificence, Robert Manvers did not happen to be one of them, and with a light heart and a joyous spirit, he placed his life at his father's disposal, who guaranteed to invest it in the bank of happiness. And lo! this, together with the budding bloom of youthful love, this ambitious parent bartered for gold. It was some time before Robert Manvers discovered, beneath the gold lining in his pockets, the insolvency of his heart and the bankruptcy in his expectations. He had

bargained for an El Dorado of felicity, and it had turned out to be only a mine of disappointment. He had anticipated excavating all the inward pleasures of life, and instead, he had only unearthed the small sand of outward worries. It had all turned out a delusion, a cheat, and a swindle, whilst he, himself, had been the victim of his mercenary father's fraud. Thus had Robert Manvers come to regard his life, till finding there could be no redress for his wrongs, he resolved to reconcile himself to the inevitable, and enjoy those limited pleasures which monetary fortune afforded him. And, though unsuccessful in his marriage lottery, his cultivated mind bestowed on him a wealth of recreation and diverted his troubled spirit, when inclined to brood over his domestic grievances. Mrs. Manvers, as we have said, hated the country, and was very constantly absent from home, but fortunately for her husband, she arranged her plans independent of him, so that,

when not staying at friend's houses, she generally obtained the companionship of some congenial spirit to accompany her in her seaside trips, and when staying at other places of fashionable resort. In London, besides her husband's sister-in-law, whose house was always open to her, Mrs. Manvers had two or three relatives of her own, and though, during her visits, she managed to accumulate a goodly array of fashionable clothing, purchased at extravagant prices, so long as she kept within certain bounds, Robert Manvers was willing to pay handsomely for the peace and repose which pervaded his home during his wife's absence. On these occasions he would be seen oftener in company with his children, and though the whole of his mornings were devoted to study, whilst theirs were in the schoolroom, their afternoon play hours he spent in amusing them. When Mrs. Manvers was away Violet and himself would have an early dinner with

Edith and Maud; and after taking a long drive would return to tea, and then adjourn to the drawing-room until the children's bed time; when Violet would be left alone the remainder of the evening. Mr. Manvers would then again retire to his study, only coming back about ten o'clock for the purpose of taking a glass of wine and a biscuit previous to wishing her good-night. Violet enjoyed the peace of these solitary evenings after her day's toil, as they gave her an opportunity of writing her letters and reading books which she selected from Mr. Manvers' treasury of knowledge.

Beyond the shooting season—when Castle Manvers became the hospitable resort for sportsmen, who sometimes came accompanied with their wives and daughters when spending a week or fortnight walking over Robert Manvers' preserves—the old house welcomed but few visitors beyond the relatives belonging to the family. The first of September will be in another fortnight's time, and Mr.

Manvers expects to go out with at least six guns on that day. His wife always enjoys having the house full, and has gone to spend a few days in Town with her sister-in-law, in order to see about some new dresses, and make sundry preparations in the way of purchases for the expected guests. Robert Manvers escorted his wife to London, as she decided to leave Baines behind to transact the duties of parlour-maid, as the servant who was in the habit of performing these functions was away on her holiday. Robert Mauvers did not stay longer than the one night in Town, and returned home on the following day. During the early dinner Violet noticed that he was depressed as well as absent, and not at all in his ordinary spirits. Unlike his customary habits, he did not spend the afternoon with the children, neither did he appear at tea time, but ordered a cup to be brought to him in his study. After Edith and Maud had gone to bed Violet wrote her

weekly letter to Mr. Daniel and also a few lines to Mrs. Knight, telling her how much she was looking forward to her promised visit; she having been among the friends invited to Manvers' Castle during the shooting season. With the Lancasters Violet's correspondence had long since ceased. She had written to Florence after having seen her mother's death in the paper, but had not received any answer, and her latest tidings of them had been through Mr. Daniel, who had gathered from a casual club acquaintance, who had come across the Lancasters recently in Paris, that Florence was engaged to Comte Mirabeau, a French nobleman, of good family, and reported to have a considerable fortune, as well as a fine château in Normandy. But beyond these indirect scraps of news, Violet knew nothing about the present movements of her late friends. It was ten o'clock by the time she finished writing her letters, and the servant had brought in the tray of wine

and biscuits. It was, therefore, hardly worth while to commence anything else for that evening, but not caring to be found by Mr. Manvers with her hands idle before her, she took from her work-basket a white *tulle ruche* and began to gather this into a frill for her neck. For this purpose she places herself in a low chair near the lamp, which throws the light down on her pretty smooth head. I wonder what Harold Trevelyan would have thought of her now, could he but have glimpsed her pale face with its shade of melancholy, as her deft fingers ply the needle, which some suppose is the same comfort to the woman that the pipe is to the man. And whither do Violet's own thoughts roam? Within her little hive of thought she has probably bees working plans for the future, others preparing for the present, but the majority, I fear, are still ruminating over the little cells of the past—that loved, though mournful past! Those days which were, and

now are not ! Wherefore had they thus quickly vanished ? Why had she not been permitted to bask a few months longer in the sunshine of life before the blasting winds strewed her path with the leaves of her affections, and forced her to shelter her myrtle by protecting it with her own warm heart from the premature frost ?

“ But why so short is love's delighted hour ?
Why fades the dew on beauty's sweetest flower ?
Why can no hymned charm of music heal
The sleepless woes impassioned spirits feel ?
Can fancy's fairy hands no veil create,
To hide the sad realities of fate ? ”

* * * * *

“ I dare say you were beginning to think I was not coming in at all this evening, Miss Vernon, after having avoided you so much all day. I suppose Edith and Maud were quite disappointed, or perhaps you made my loss up to them by telling a story instead ! ” said Robert Manvers, when he at length made his

appearance, and was filling the wine glasses for Violet and himself.

"I have been busy writing a short article for a magazine, and hoped to have finished it, but could not find a passage I was desirous of quoting, and feeling rather weary, I shall leave it till to-morrow."

"Can I help you, Mr. Manvers? If you will give me some idea of the passage you seek, I might know where to find it."

"It is very kind of you, Miss Vernon; unfortunately, I am unable to avail myself of your obliging offer, as I know where it is to be found but have mislaid the book required. It is one of the pertinent remarks of old Dr. Johnson that I have been hunting for. I have looked all through Boswell's pages on his life, but can't find it, so I rather fancy it must be in the 'Lives of the Poets,' and this volume seems to have disappeared from my library."

"I have it upstairs. I will go and fetch

it," replied Violet, eagerly springing from her chair, and before Robert Manvers had time to remonstrate, she was out of the door, intent on bringing him the book.

"I am so sorry to have given you all this trouble," said he, when she returned. "It could easily have waited until to-morrow. But this isn't *my* book," added he, surveying the binding, and, opening it on a fly leaf, he read aloud, "*To Violet, with Harold's love.*" The words appeared to scorch the tympanums of her ears as she listened to Robert Manvers' slow, measured voice, couple these names in speech. It was the first time Violet had ever heard Harold's name breathed in the same breath as her own by another, and it struck her as an echo from her heart's lost chord.

"Yes, the book is mine," she answered hastily, as the colour mantled her cheeks, and overwhelmed her with confusion. Then making a desperate effort at composure, she

added, "It was given to me by a—a—friend. I, too, Mr. Manvers, like yourself, have a great affection for books." Violet falsely flattered herself, if she fancied her awkwardness had not been observed by her companion, who had been watching her narrowly, and had drawn his own conclusions.

"She has *loved*," he thought to himself, "and *this* Harold has been her lover. She has, as I thought, passed through the 'Cleansing fires.'" Then, in acknowledgment of her last remark, he replied, "Yes, Miss Vernon, knowledge is power, though we all pay very dearly for this possession. Do you know," continued he, as, having found the quotation he had been seeking for, he proceeded to enter it in a small note book, which he drew from his pocket, "I often think that independent of all the abuse scientific and rational thinkers have showered upon the little Biblical story of the Garden of Eden, there is a great deal of wisdom in the legend,

if we must agree to call it so. And viewed from the painful moral that may be drawn from it, there is a sad reality ; for who can deny that man's superior knowledge over the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, is the pivot upon which all his sorrows, woes, and unhappiness gravitate. You think me cynical, Miss Vernon, but I cannot help regarding our lot in life with a touch of bitterness, when I think that man makes a proud boast of being able to reflect, learn, and know. Like Prometheus, who stole fire from Heaven, we stole knowledge from the Garden of Eden. The proverb tells us ' Cheats do not prosper,' and it certainly cannot be said that knowledge makes happiness progressive, because they who know most are of all men most miserable."

" And yet, don't you think, Mr. Manvers, we all enjoy more pleasure in the exercise of our mental and moral faculties than we can derive from anything appertaining to the

muscular exertions of the body?" put in Violet, dubiously.

"By no means, Miss Vernon. The man of thought is almost always discontented because there is a restless, ambitious spirit within him which is continually goading him into fresh labyrinths of speculative philosophy, and which the noblest attainments in his discoveries fail either to satiate or satisfy, and so he hungers to know more, till that which should have nourished his body becomes absorbed by the greediness of his mind, and so he ends by becoming a dyspeptic pessimist. The rural peasant, or man of bone and muscle, is, on the other hand, the most jovial among his fellows, because his body is kept in prime working order by the constant practice of his limbs; and as his muscles expand his brain power diminishes, until he loses all susceptibility to any acute mental suffering beyond the passing sensation of his bodily aches and pains. Depend upon

it, man pays very dearly for his reflective intelligence. It makes him aware of the difficulties and dangers which beset and ensnare him in his life paths, whilst it leaves him at the same time powerless in the hands of an immutable destiny. We are, therefore, left in a state of perpetual speculation and apprehension concerning our future, which frequently causes us to create probabilities of dire misfortune which may, possibly, befall ourselves, but which turn out oftener to be only the weird ghosts of our imaginations. For are not half our sorrows more perspective than real?"

"But don't you think, Mr. Manvers, some of us derive a pleasure even from our mental sorrows?" enquired Violet, paradoxically.

"My dear Miss Vernon, believe me that if it is happiness we all wish for (and this, I take it, is our true aim in life) it would be wise to remember that it is fatal to think. Personal experience must show us that the

happiest men and women have very surface minds, and live the butterfly life of the hour. Take my advice, Miss Vernon, forget the past, enjoy the present, and don't mind about the future. Are you aware how we have forgotten the hour ? It is half-past twelve." And, hastily lighting the candles, Robert Manvers shook Violet warmly by the hand, and bade her good-night.

* * * * *

The next day Robert Manvers spent his afternoon as usual, with his children. After the early dinner he took them with Violet for a drive, and when tea was over he remained with them in the drawing-room, amusing them with photographic scraps and pictures, whilst she sang some songs. When the children's bed time came, unlike his usual habit of retiring to his study, he remained talking to Violet, whose fingers were employed em-

broidering her initials on some new pocket-handkerchiefs.

“ May I read something aloud to you, Miss Vernon ? ” enquired he, turning over the three or four books which lay on a table near him.

“ I don’t feel at all inclined to seclude myself this evening, after our charming conversation last night. It is not often I meet with so congenial a spirit.”

“ I should like you to read something very much, indeed, and then we can discuss it afterwards and see if our ideas correspond,” replied Violet, graciously.

“ Yes, that will be most interesting. Which shall it be then, Miss Vernon—poetry or prose ? ”

“ I think I should prefer prose. Poetry, when I listen to it read by another, generally has the effect of making me feel sad.”

“ Then I will read whatever you like best,” returned Robert Manvers ; “ but I am disap-

pointed that you have denied me the pleasure of reading you my favourite poem, 'Childe Harold.'"

"Oh, no; please not that! I hate nearly all of Byron's poetry, and that poem carries with it so many painful associations," replied Violet, becoming very nervous and confused.

"Don't you like it?" he enquired, in a tone of surprise. "To me, it is one of the finest poems that has ever been written. It records the philosophy of sighs and tears, as well as the butterfly existence, and so would afford me another opportunity of giving you a little lecture at its close in continuation of our subject of last evening."

"Please don't ask me to listen to it. I really cannot bear it!" again replied Violet, looking appealingly into Mr. Manvers' face as she spoke, and as she did so he caught sight of tears rising in her eyes.

"I will not read it; but will you give me

your reasons for disliking this poem?" enquired he, returning her gaze with a kind, soft, expression of interest and curiosity.

Violet shrank from confessing it. Why should she unfold the delicate tendrils of her heart to show this man the treasured myrtle that it clasped? What consolation could even his sympathy render to her, since she had reconciled herself to live on the memories of that idol within her breast? To no living being had she ever before confided the sad secret of her life. Why then should she now lay bare her barren existence with its one flower, before Robert Manvers? and what claim had he to become a participator in her grief?

Still hesitating, and making no reply to his question, he repeated it.

"You object to give me your reasons then, Miss Vernon?"

"I do. I have already told you it recalls very painful associations. And I love best

to brood over that which makes me melancholy with my inner self, and do not care to have it shared by another," replied Violet, sorrowfully.

"Then you must have a very unsociable nature, Miss Vernon. With me it is quite different. I am always yearning to find some one who will commiserate with me, and then, out I pour the contents of my sorrows, and, by what I suppose you would consider these superfluous effusions, I obtain relief. Depend upon it, sympathy is grief's safety-valve, and the pining heart will burst without the escape afforded by compassion."

Robert Manvers' voice was very soft, and as he finished speaking there was a benevolent expression about his kind face, which had its influence on Violet, and inclined her to become more confidential.

"But when one's sorrows belong to the past, Mr. Manvers, and must inevitably be endured in the future; what good can it

then do one to confide them to another?" enquired she, with her large liquid eyes looking disconsolately into his own.

"As it belongs to the past, the grief that has been expended over it, is, of course, irrevocable," was the reply. "But this does not prevent it from being entirely eradicated in the future, and the sorrow greatly mitigated in the present by the consoling sympathy afforded by another. But I can see, Miss Vernon, that you are a true Spartan, because there is a fox gnawing at your heart, and yet you would rather die than complain. You have gone through a large amount of suffering; it is impossible to conceal it from me any longer, for I can read it in your face, your thoughts, your manner. Believe me, I do but tell you what I observe, out of kindness, because I can see grief feeds on your daily existence, and is becoming one of your strongest instincts. Pardon me, my dear Miss Vernon, for attempting to peep behind

the scenes of your inner thoughts, which you so carefully refrain from divulging, and believe me again, when I tell you that my rather persistent enquiries do not in any way arise from a vulgar curiosity, but spring from the pure fountain of true friendship. Can't you believe that when I see you bearing a burthen of sorrow which is almost as great as Bunyan's Pilgrim when he fell into the 'Slough of Despond,' that I yearn to do the little that is in my power to alleviate your melancholy condition? You are not happy, Miss Vernon, and I feel that your grief has become a deep-seated disease, and consequently more difficult to exterminate than anything belonging to the ordinary accidents of life, because there is so much depth of feeling about your character that I fancy *you* would feel agonies where *others* would barely suffer; and where your love kindled into flame it would not only absorb all your lesser affections during the ecstasy of its existence,

but it would likewise smoulder on, unquenchable in its fidelity even when a cruel wrong had crushed and broken this royal jewel, which is so rare in woman's diadem. You see, Miss Vernon, how I have analysed your character. Will you tell me if I am right in attributing to you this great fidelity in love?"

There was so much of respectful humility in the tone and manner of Robert Manvers whilst he had been speaking that it could hardly fail to have other than a desirable effect on Violet.

"Yes; I have loved, still love, and must ever love he who is my love," she replied, trembling in every limb; and unable to sustain any longer the tension on her feelings, she buried her face in her hands, and washed them with the torrents of her tears. She had not cried like this for years, and her burst of sobs came like a very wail of woe to Robert Manvers, as he sat bitterly rueing the dire distress he had thus so unwittingly

caused, not having calculated, from the nature of his conversation, that this sudden, overwhelming downpour from a flooded soul, was likely to overtake him.

In the greatest uneasiness of mind he paced rapidly up and down the room; his sympathetic nature writhing betwixt pity and decorum, till at last it conquered in a victory which was more cruel than defeat, considering the suffering it cost him.

Walking gently up to Violet, he took one of her small hands within his own, and did his utmost to calm and soothe her with every kind and gentle word in his vocabulary. For what man could look calmly on a woman so suffering and not make some attempt to assuage such ungovernable grief? For are not half love's conquests won by the electric fluid of tears? which makes strong men humble themselves in the dust, like devotees at the shrine of their saint, before the emotional passions of women.

Robert Manvers, of all men, could not so

steel his naturally warm, impulsive heart ; so, kneeling before Violet, with all the respect which was so inherent in his honourable character, he used every means in his power to restore her to composure.

Her heart had burst its water gates ; the barriers to its assertion had been carried away ; and after the inundation began to subside, with all the *abandon* that grief lends to despair, she unfolded the petals of her sensitive plant, and so laid bare her love for Harold.

She described to her sympathetic listener her pleasant months at Nice, the delicious evening on the balcony, the love letter, accompanied by the book ; the early days of hope, joy, and expectation spent at Ramsgate, succeeded by weary ones watching and waiting for his letters—which never came. Not a line had come to cheer the desolate hearth of her solitary lodging, which was then her only home, save that one insult,

which had pierced her heart like a sword, when her first and only love letter, together with the cold, formal words he had scrawled on his visiting card, fell at her feet, leaving her dazed, stunned, and paralysed at the magnitude of her loss.

And as Robert Manvers listened to the history of her great wrong, a fierce passion of rage and indignation rose within his manly breast against the mean and dastardly conduct of the man whom she still so devotedly loved. He longed to revenge her. Aye, and with that vengeance which claims an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, did he long to requite the base conduct of this villain who could thus heartlessly forsake this weak, defenceless, loving thing, which drooped like a lily on a broken stem before him.

“ Oh, what would I not have given to have been blessed with this same love which he has scorned and so ruthlessly rejected ! ” came with all the fervour of a prayer from him.

As in token of his admiration for her character, and in accordance with the respect due from his position, Robert Manvers raised Violet's hand for one moment to his lips.

At this same instant there was a footfall on the stairs, the drawing-room door was gently turned, and on its threshold stood Baines, accompanied by the cook, with astonishment and wonder written on their faces.

The first-mentioned individual took the initiative in the way of accounting for their presence.

"Dear! dear!!" said she, "cook and I fancied, by lights still burning below stairs, there must be burglars in the house. But so there are, for the matter of that, only they're stealing hearts as don't belong to them, instead of silver spoons."

"Be gone, woman, with your base impertinence!" replied Robert Manvers, sternly, at the same time rising from his knees with some confusion, for he thought his position

looked awkward, to say the least of it, and this sudden apparition of his servants took him completely by surprise.

Violet, on the other hand, after the first start their appearance had given her, had quite regained composure. Her feelings had already been strung to such a high pitch of emotion, that her nervous energies were exhausted, and she remained lethargic and passive.

"Yes, no doubt cook and I are two too many," continued Baines, holding herself erect with proper pride. "But it don't seem quite the thing, all the same, Mr. Manvers, to stay up till after two o'clock in the morning making love to the governess during the absence of my poor dear mistress, and no more will I tacitly recognise such conduct."

The veins of Robert Manvers' forehead were swollen into small knotted cords, and his face wore a dusky hue, as he scorned to defend and justify himself from the slander-

ous imputations which had come from this menial. But it was as much as he could do to restrain himself from an outburst of ungovernable passion, as he beheld the gloating, sinister expression of Baines as she regarded Violet, who sat looking vacantly before her, apparently quite indifferent to the exigencies of the occasion.

“What do you stand there for?” he shouted, as he read a sneer of contempt in her face. “Be gone, I say, and in future mind your own business.”

“And isn’t the safety of my master’s house my business, Mr. Manvers?” enquired the woman, indignantly. “Aye, and you would be sharp enough to thank me for keeping watch at any other time, when you don’t happen to be the thief yourself; but then, of course, it’s different, quite different then,” added she, sneeringly. “But mistress shall know of this, though it cost me my place. She shall not be wronged in this way whilst

I stand by, and calmly countenance such goings on. And how a gentleman in your position, sir, can so demean yourself as—”

“Take yourself off, you vile wretch, will you, or shall I be obliged to turn you out?” interrupted Robert Manvers, threateningly, and driven beyond endurance by the creature’s taunting tones. “Do you suppose I am going to listen to such insulting gibes from your base lying tongue in my own house? By the dawn that follows to-night, you leave this place, and enter it afterwards at your peril. Go, woman, I defy you. Do your worst.”

Beads of perspiration glistened on Robert Manvers’ brow, as Baines made her retreat with the cook, who had stood as rigid as a figure in a dumb show. But it proceeded, not so much from the exertion his fierce words had caused him, as a secret anxiety which had suddenly swept across his mind respecting his own thoughtless conduct for sitting

up to such a late hour alone with Violet. He realised the gravity of his position in an instant, and how appearances would go dead against both himself and her when the facts came to the knowledge of his wife.

He had made Baines his enemy ; he had defied her to do her worst ; he had not attempted to conciliate her, because he could not bring himself down to so mean a level. His conscience did not reproach him for anything he had done, and yet he felt it was in the power of this woman to destroy, not only the little confidence his wife might have in him, but, worse than all, the fate of Violet's reputation was in her hands.

He had roused Baines' vengeance, when, for Violet's sake, it might have been worth his while not only to have swallowed this woman's insults, but likewise to have endeavoured judiciously to conciliate her low-minded suspicions, considering how dangerous it was possible for her to become, on account of the enormous influence she exercised over his wife.

Would not Mrs. Manvers be much more willing to believe the evidence given by her maid, which could be corroborated by that other witness, the cook, than by the most truthful explanation he or Violet could give contrary to their statements?

By his foolish conduct he had brought himself into one of the most awkward dilemmas that a man, with honourable intentions and upright principles, could possibly be placed in. Appearances were dead against them both. Violet's reputation would be compromised by the slanderous assertions of Baines, and she would be the innocent victim of his indiscretions. Mrs. Manvers would inevitably suspect, even if she did not fully believe, the worst, and so brand this pure-minded, unprotected girl with these base imputations, and cast her out into the world with her fair fame sullied.

* * * * *

Robert Manvers' worst suspicions were

realised. Baines, after receiving her dismissal, lost no time in writing to her mistress, acquainting her with her own version of the whole affair. Mrs. Manvers, in consequence, left Town a day earlier than she intended, and, after a private interview held with Baines at a house in the village, she reached her home in a fury of jealous passion with her husband and Violet.

After causing a scene of the most painful description, she declared she would not submit to Miss Vernon remaining another day under her roof, and that, as her husband had dismissed her maid, she, too, would dismiss the governess.

Finally, loading Violet with the coarsest epithets, Mrs. Manvers slammed the door of her bedroom after her, vowing she would not reappear until the disreputable girl, with her bag and baggage, had cleared out of the house.



CHAPTER V.

AGAIN ON THE WORLD.

"And when, as tossed on waves of woe,
My harassed heart was doomed to know
The frantic burst, the outrage keen,
And the slow pang that gnaws unseen ;
Then, shipwrecked on life's stormy sea,
I heaved an anguish'd sigh for thee."

"The Sigh."

WHEN Violet Vernon left Castle Manvers, she took the train for Paddington, and, after having secured a bed at the nearest hotel, she wrote a letter to Mr. Daniel, which she addressed to his club, acquainting him, in a few hurried lines, of her present desolate position.

She knew he was in London, because she had heard from him within the past week, and

this fact had doubtless constituted her sole reason for choosing the line of rail which led to the great Metropolis in preference to all other places, for Mr. Daniel was her one friend in the whole wide world whom she could rely upon in all cases of emergency like the present.

Neither had Violet miscalculated or over-rated this benevolent man's kindness, for the same evening of her arrival found him sitting by her side, relieving her mind of all its doubts and fears, and cheering her with hopes concerning her future.

With the delicate tact of the true man of the world, he forebore asking her any questions relative to her sudden departure from Castle Manvers, beyond the few he found it necessary to make in the way of comments to the remarks which came voluntarily from herself. And when she had unburdened her heart of its cares, he buoyed up her drooping spirits with all sorts of pleasant suggestions,

and left her that evening with a promise to return early next morning for the purpose of accompanying her in a search for some suitable lodgings.

Poor Violet ! She was in sad need of all her friend's encouragement ! For the crushing disgrace that had befallen her, made her feel like a poor coursed hare, which has just escaped from the pursuing greyhounds.

* * * * *

"I have a grand scheme for you, and something which, I hope you will like," said Mr. Daniel, a week after he had comfortably installed Violet in a neatly furnished apartment, at Kensington. "Do you remember Herr Münster, the little German you met some years ago at a musical *soirée* given by the Lancasters in Paris ?"

"Yes, perfectly. He told me then he was a friend of yours, and, I recollect, sent you some message through me."

“What about him?” enquired Violet, turning her weary eyes, with a little more interest in them, on her kind, thoughtful friend.

“Only this. He happens to be in Town, and had a long conversation with me last night. It appears he has some appointment at the University of Heidelberg, and has to stay at that place for six months. He wishes his wife to accompany him, but intends keeping his house in Berlin for his children, and it seems that part of his business in England is to find an English lady who will undertake the management of his household during his absence. I haven’t mentioned your name to him in connection with this, because I thought it better to come and consult you first. But I told him you were here, and he expressed a wish to renew your acquaintance. He remembered your singing perfectly, and I could see by the way he spoke that he had retained rather a favourable recollection of you. I think it would be just the very thing

to suit ; so, shall I bring him here in order that you may have a chat, and settle matters your own way ? ”

“ I should like it of all things,” replied Violet, tears of gratitude moistening her eyes as she spoke. “ How very kind it is of you, Mr. Daniel, to be always thinking of me in this way. I feel I can never sufficiently thank you for all you have done for me.”

“ My dear girl, we should be all bulls and bears if we didn’t do some little actions occasionally to assist one another,” replied he, smiling, and then added, “ Shall I bring Herr Münster to-morrow ? ”

Violet assented, and the next day brought the good-natured little German to her lodging.

Herr Münster was greatly surprised at the change that had taken place in Violet’s appearance, and could not help expressing that he should never have known her again, only adding, apologetically, that this might be attributed to their former very casual

acquaintance, he not having met Violet more than three or four times during the time she was with the Lancasters in Paris.

Herr Münster was able to tell Violet something about her late friends. He informed her that Captain MacDonald was engaged to a pretty Irish girl, that Florence had married Comte Mirabeau, and was staying in her *château* in Normandy. Also, that General Lancaster, whom he had seen quite recently, was looking remarkably well, and still had the same house in Paris, where Florence very constantly stayed with him, and it was rumoured that her domestic felicity with her husband was by no means all that could be desired. 'Also, that he (Herr Münster) knew before they were married that Comte Mirabeau was not only somewhat addicted to drinking, but was likewise an inveterate gambler.

"And what are you doing, Miss Vernon?" enquired the little German, breaking off suddenly in his conversation, which he had

been sustaining in the most fluent of broken English. "Are you in London only for a time, or is this your permanent abode?"

"Only for a time," replied Violet, slightly confused. "I have made no plans for the future, but I shall stay here until I can find some employment, either by teaching, or becoming a companion."

"You must not overwork yourself, Miss Vernon. You look pale, and strike me as one who requires rest. Is your health good, because I should say you were delicate?"

"No, I am quite well, thank you; but I have suffered lately from a worry which has preyed rather upon my spirits."

"Ah! so I thought! so I thought! Dreadful things these worries to bring the wrinkles in our faces!" exclaimed Herr Münster, emphatically, and then added, "But you need a change to throw them away; that is the only thing which does good. Try our country, Miss Vernon; come to Berlin. Let me

persuade you into paying us a little visit; my wife will be delighted to make your acquaintance. Will you come back with me?" enquired he, eagerly, perceiving Violet hesitated, not knowing in what way to reply. "I will make you an offer, Miss Vernon, and you can decline or accept, as it suits you. In two months' time, my wife and I go to Heidelberg, as I have something to do at the University. I intend to leave my children in Berlin, because they go to school, and I don't wish to upset them in their lessons for the sake of having them with me during the few months I shall be away. But during our absence, we shall want some lady to look after the house, and see to the requirements of the children. So, to make a long story short, will you be that lady? Return with me in a week's time, and be my wife's guest for the next two months, in order to become acquainted with our habits and the ordinary routine of our house, so that when my wife

and I leave for Heidelberg, you may be able to take the entire charge of everything until our return. You need have nothing to do with the children, beyond seeing they attend their schools regularly, and are happy. I have only one stipulation to make, but this *one* I must be very strict about. Speak to them nothing except it be in English. I want them to learn well the language, and they are shy about it. Do *you* speak German, Miss Vernon ? ”

“ Not a word,” replied Violet, smiling.

“ O, then, so much the better ; at least, I mean as far as I am concerned, because I am looking for some one who can’t speak. But what am I to infer from all this silence ? Does it mean consent ? ” enquired Herr Münster, finishing all he had to say, and expecting some answer.

“ Yes, I will come with great pleasure, and thank you again and again for so much kindness.”

“No kindness at all, Miss Vernon; the favour is on my side rather than yours. I assure you, I congratulate myself on having obtained the trustworthy services of some one I have a knowledge of. You are a great friend of Mr. Daniel’s, and that will be quite enough for my wife; so may I write and tell her all is so far arranged between us?” enquired he, as he took Violet’s hand on leaving.

“Oh, yes! I will certainly not fail you, and again so many thanks.”

“Then in a week’s time, Miss Vernon, we shall start. I have much business to arrange in England, but I will manage to see you once more between this and then.”

* * * * *

It is seven o’clock in the evening of the day before Violet Vernon starts for Berlin, as looking a pale, haggard, little thing, after the fatigue of packing, she has thrown herself into her arm-chair for the purpose of in-

dulging in forty winks before her sitting-room is lighted. Poor desolate little Violet ! “ A reed driven by the wind, and tossed.” Here to-day, and God knows where to-morrow ! Such may be given as a description of her lot in life. How heavy from sheer weariness are her slumbers. Until startled by a sudden ring and knock at the street door, she starts up, and, conscious of her appearance being anything but tidy after her exertions from packing, she makes a hasty retreat to her bedroom, and is caught in the act of running a comb through her soft hair by the lodging-house slavey, who comes to announce the arrival of Mr. Daniel, accompanied by another gentleman. Contenting herself with the conjecture that the second individual could be none other than Herr Münster, she bade the servant light the gas, and inform the gentlemen she would be with them in a few minutes.

Her surprise was therefore great when, on entering the sitting-room, she discovered her

second visitor to be none other than Robert Manvers. Violet was so much embarrassed, that it was some little time before she recovered herself sufficiently to give him even the conventional greeting, so that he, mistaking her manner as indicating his presence an intrusion, hastened to give reasons for his *mal-à-propos* visit.

“I must apologise, Miss Vernon, for causing you this unpleasant surprise,” said he, with much humility. “But I come on an errand which is to me a most momentous one, and had I delayed it another day, I should have been too late, as I understand from Mr. Daniel that you leave England for Berlin to-morrow. Be assured, Miss Vernon, I should have made a point of seeing you before this had I been acquainted with your whereabouts. But in consequence of the painful circumstances which happened lately at my house, my sole means of tracing your retreat was through Mrs. Knight, who referred me to

your friend, Mr. Daniel. I only reached Town an hour ago, so it can hardly be said I have not made the most of my vantage-ground, after I had gained it."

"Am I to take your visit as intended to wish me good-by, Mr. Manvers?" enquired Violet gently, becoming nervous in the anticipation of what his conversation was likely to lead to. "If so," continued she, "it is very kind, and I thank you. I have several times felt very sorry about the unfortunate position I have placed you in, as I fancy the injury done by the servants has been greater on your side than on mine."

She blushed, being conscious that her words were gradually drifting towards the boundaries of shameful imputations.

"Pardon me, Miss Vernon," replied Robert Manvers with dignity, "but I had hoped to have avoided as much as possible this topic which has cost us both so much, and to have agreed to bury it, as being un-

worthy of possessing the smallest landmark in either of our memories, since we still retain those clear consciences which entitle us to tread as pedestrians the royal road of honour. But for the purpose of still further insuring this footpath, which the malice of some would endeavour to thrust us from, I have come to promise the small restitution there remains in my power to afford you, and which, by your acceptance, will be the one thing most conducive towards reconciling me to my past thoughtless, injudicious conduct. I feel I owe you a deep debt, Miss Vernon, and one which this exorbitant, hard world will rarely allow a man to repay a woman. My wife has ruthlessly endeavoured to rob you of your good name, and to defeat this, depend upon it, I will take all measures in my power during my lifetime, to leave not one single imputation that has been cast upon you unrefuted. But I would like to do something more than this ; perhaps what

I am about to suggest, may never be anything beyond a *sentiment*, but if it should be only this, you at least will have the satisfaction of knowing the esteem I feel for you. To breathe words of love in my present position as a married man, would, I am aware, be only to insult you. But I swear in your presence, and in that of Mr. Daniel's, who is here this evening for the purpose of being a witness, that, if in the future, fate decrees me free, and severs the fetters of my wedlock, that my heart and hand shall be yours, if you will consent to accept them. And as a further witness to the oath which I have taken, I would wish you to accept this small token to remind you of this promise."

Here Robert Manvers drew from his breast-pocket a small case, which he opened, and displayed a gold locket, on the outside of which was the Latin proverb, "*Sola nobilitas virtus*," set in brilliants, and encircled with a wreath of gold roses.

“ Will you take this with the oath I have made ? ” enquired he, looking at Violet with great anxiety, as he perceived a hesitation in her manner about accepting it.

“ I cannot, Mr. Manvers,” she replied. “ It is bigamy in thought, if not in deed. I know you mean it well,” added she, looking sorrowfully into his face of disappointment, “ but it is doing a great wrong to your wife, and I cannot countenance your taking any oath on my behalf, where its fulfilment is subservient to another’s death.”

“ Then you refuse to take my oath, or to make one yourself, Miss Vernon ? ”

“ I do. Probably I shall never marry ; but, at least, I cannot consent to make a vow to a married man not to do so, and my conscience likewise forbids me to make you any promise which could only come into force on your wife’s death. Cease, therefore, my dear Mr. Manvers, to ask me any more to grant you a request which justice refuses to

accord, and believe you have my best esteem and most sincere gratitude, even though I feel in duty bound to refuse what you have so generously offered."

"Perhaps you are right," returned Robert Manvers, sadly, "I respect your scruples, though I cannot quite sympathise with them, but I can reconcile myself to your decision if you will still accept this locket, Miss Vernon, in memory of our *friendship*."

"I will, provided it does not bind me to any stipulations," replied Violet.

"Agreed, and may fortune one day favour me, and permit my calling you by a nearer and dearer name than *friend*," returned Robert Manvers, taking her hand within his own, and raising it to his lips. "Till then, may God bless you," added he mournfully, and then murmured, "Farewell."





CHAPTER VI.

WITH THE MISSES FAVERSHAM.

"Cease, every joy, to glimmer on my mind,
But leave—oh! leave the light of Hope behind!
What though my wingéd hours of bliss have been,
Like angel visits, few and far between."

"Pleasures of Hope."

AGAIN we must shift the scenes, and passing over the year our heroine spent in Berlin with the kind-hearted Münster's family, we re-introduce her living with the Misses Faversham, late of Tyler Grange, who are at this time residing at Brighton. Before continuing further, however, it will be necessary to give a little explanation in order to account for this sudden transformation. About six months after Violet had gone to Germany,

Mr. Daniel had, whilst strolling one morning up Regent Street, encountered our old and somewhat forgotten friends the Misses Favérsham, looking very little changed to when they carried on the arduous duties of their seminary in Kent. A long, friendly conversation had ensued, from which Mr. Daniel gathered that the ladies had leased a small house at Brighton, and had come to London for the day on "pleasure bent." Numerous were the enquiries made concerning the fate and welfare of Violet Vernon and Florence Lancaster, to many of which Mr. Daniel was able to give satisfactory answers, and, in as few words as possible, gave them a recapitulation of what we already know, concerning the fortunes of their late pupils. Miss Jane was most inquisitive to know how much longer Violet intended remaining in Berlin, and hoped she would return to England soon, as she should so much like to see the "dear girl" again. This led to the suggestion

from Miss Faversham of writing to Violet, which had been accomplished a few days after their meeting with Mr. Daniel, and by this means an affectionate correspondence had been renewed and continued during the remainder of her stay with Herr Münster and his family between Violet and her late schoolmistresses, terminating in a most pressing invitation to pay them a visit in their little home at Brighton whenever circumstances favoured her return to England. Violet had suffered much from ill health during her stay with the kind, homely German family, and soon after Herr Münster's return from Heidelberg, Mr. Daniel, who had been spending a week in Berlin for the purpose of seeing his friends, was so concerned at her wasted form and pale face, with the dark circles round her hollow pensive eyes, that he advised her to consult a doctor on the state of her health. The physician detected no seeds of consumptive disease, but pro-

nounced her system to be in such a general state of disorder, that it would in all probability lead to a rapid decline, unless measures of precaution were not immediately taken to build up with care and attention the declining tissues. And so Violet's delicate state of health coming to the knowledge of the Misses Faversham through Mr. Daniel, who had promised to give them an account of her, nothing would satisfy the tender-hearted sisters until she had consented to try the Brighton air, beneath their homely hospitable little roof.

* * * * *

Violet has now been staying with them many months, and so attached to her have the sister's become, that they will listen to no plans which will necessitate her leaving Brighton. Miss Faversham has obtained for her a morning engagement from ten to twelve, for the purpose of teaching a little

girl belonging to a Mrs. Wallace, who lives only a short distance from themselves, and with whom they are on most friendly terms. The daily routine of the Misses Faversham's little dwelling is monotonous, and there are no startling adventures to record in their hum-drum existence. The sisters are themselves elderly, and have long ceased to care about the vanities and frivolities of life. They have few friends, and have no wish to extend their acquaintance.

Miss Faversham is upwards of seventy, and her hair is almost white. Her face looks old and careworn, but her figure is by no means so angular, and her manners are less stern than they were in days of yore. Age has evidently mellowed all the natural harshness into tones of benignity. Miss Jane is the same unselfish amiable creature she has always been, perhaps she may have a little more self-assertion than formerly, but this is an improvement. She is an active-minded little

woman, and fancies she can never do half enough for Violet, who she treats as a child, and watches her health with the most jealous care, insisting on the administration of a tonic at the least hint of fatigue which she detects either from Violet's face or manner. It is always Miss Jane who devises the small schemes for her amusement, such as attending a concert, or going on the Parade to hear the bands play, and the good-hearted little woman appears to have lost all her powers of enjoyment when they happen to be apart, and not connected with those she arranges for Violet.

The salubrious breezes of Brighton have had a very desirable effect on the girl's health, and she is in much better spirits than when she left Germany. The tranquil repose of her present existence is like a very haven of rest, after the tossings she has encountered on the stormy billows of life. Her one little pupil affords her a great interest, for she is a

quick clever child, and repays the pains Violet takes in teaching her. Little Mildred, on her side, has formed quite a romantic attachment for Violet, and is never so happy as when permitted to accompany her governess in her walk, and bring her back to tea. The Wallaces were gay, fashionable people, who had a very large circle of friends, and occasionally gave large dinner parties. And to these they had more than once invited Violet for the purpose of singing to their guests. The Misses Faversham declined all invitations, but were glad Violet should accept all such recreation, which was not kept up late enough to endanger her health.

It was one day in mid-autumn when the Brighton season was at its height, and the hotels, boarding houses, and lodgings were crammed to overflowing with a heterogeneous collection of visitors, spending their time in a hungry eagerness for every kind of amusement which this fashionable and favourite

resort afforded, that Violet was dressing for a dinner party at the Wallaces.

It was to be what her friend termed one of her "sociable little dinners," as not more than ten in all were expected to sit down to table. These, she had informed Violet, had been chosen with special regard to their amalgamation as to tastes and ideas, as Mrs. Wallace regarded the absence of this as generally fatal to success in a small gathering of friends. Violet, who has been forbidden to wear anything approaching a *décolleté* style of dress for fear of injuring her delicate lungs, has arranged to wear, this evening, a pale mauve silk, which she and Miss Jane have been spending the greater part of the afternoon restoring to comparative freshness by the introduction of white tulle with small knots of ribbon.

"This dress suits you so well, dear," says the fussy little Miss Jane, who has been assisting Violet to array herself for the

dinner party, and is adjusting, with sundry stitches, a sash which confines the skirt, and prevents the train from hanging in accordance with her notions of this most important part of feminine attire.

"Now it is quite nice," added she, giving a final pull down, and backing a few paces to criticise the general effect.

"I will go and put up your songs, Violet. Three will be quite as many as you ought to sing, and don't forget that Eliza has your gloves downstairs," continued Miss Jane, who, having completed her self-imposed functions of lady's-maid, quitted the bedroom and joined her elder sister in the drawing-room.

* * * * *

Violet spent a pleasanter evening than she had expected. Mrs. Wallace was one of those kind, pleasant women who placed her guests at their ease, and there was plenty of

light effervescent social conversation, with an absence of all stiffness. Violet had been taken into dinner by Captain Mitchell, who was full of talk, and had been a great acquisition to the evening, as he amused people by singing comic songs, and describing a new burlesque, which was all the rage in Town. He belonged to the regiment then stationed at Brighton, and liked the quarter immensely, as there was so much going on, consequently he should regret leaving, but had heard they were under orders for Aldershot, and were to be relieved by the Prince Alfred Hussars.

Violet had also some conversation with a Professor Baldwin, who did his best to monopolise nearly the whole of her attention after dinner. At first she took rather a dislike to him, as he went in for paying her a number of most conventional compliments by way of winning her good graces, till Mrs. Wallace came to her rescue, and made him ex-

pound some of his deep learning, when she liked him. He was a very clever man, a great political economist, and evidently steeped in book lore, but unfortunately possessing all the selfish egotism of the *savan*. He boasted of his memory being every whit as retentive as the great Macaulay's, and appeared to have the past history of the world, and the dates of principal events, quite at his fingers' end. From the enormous amount of knowledge he had acquired, it seemed strange to Violet that the professor had not made his mark in the world, and she made bold to ask him this question, but repented of it the moment she had done so, as it exposed all the paltry littleness of the man's true character, and showed what envy rankled in his breast at the success of those whom he declared were upstarts and by no means profound thinkers like himself.

"The world often mistakes glow-worms for permanent lights," said he, "and places

them as beacons to assist mankind in their gropings through the mysterious channels of the 'enigmas of life;' but when these worms are brought into the broad daylight they are no longer visible, because the brilliancy of their surroundings outshines their individual lustre. The world, however, as you know, fancies it cannot err. It is infallible, and therefore, when it has once deified a man and placed him on the pedestal of fame, rarely consents to take him down again, but prefers to look at his failings through rose-coloured spectacles."

* * * * *

When Violet reached home that evening Miss Faversham handed her a letter from Mr. Daniel, together with "The Times" newspaper, which he was in the habit of sending whenever there was anything startling in the way of a leading article, or a bit of

news which would not be likely to find its way into the columns of other papers.

Violet opened her letter first, fancying it would afford her some clue to the piece of intelligence she expected to find in the newspaper; but when she reached the signature she had come to nothing beyond the remark that she would find something in "The Times" which would surprise her. As she was removing the string on the outside in order to relieve her mind of its curiosity before betaking herself to her bed, she was interrupted by Miss Faversham, who had been waiting for Violet to finish her letter before extinguishing the gas in the drawing-room, and was therefore rather annoyed at being still further delayed by her glancing through a paper which Violet could quite as well look over on the following morning.

"If you have finished your letter you had better come, Violet," said she rather sharply. "Jane has retired nearly an hour ago. You

forget that your dining out has made us later this evening. It is after eleven."

"One moment more, only one moment, Miss Faversham," pleaded Violet, glancing over the rapidly turned sheets, and dodging over the leading articles, money market, advertisements, and long columns of intelligence in the vain endeavour to discern some little mark or cross.

"I cannot wait for you any longer, Violet," repeated Miss Faversham, becoming quite impatient, and extinguishing the last burner of the chandelier. "Our candles are outside, and you will be fit for nothing to-morrow if you stay up so late to-night."

"I really must find this marked paragraph," persisted the girl, "or I shall not be able to sleep for conjecturing what it may be about."

"You haven't looked at the supplement at all, have you?" enquired Miss Faversham, slightly relenting, and picking up that portion

of the paper, which Violet had allowed to fall on the ground.

"I don't think it can be in there, Miss Faversham. It would hardly be an advertisement."

"It might be. Besides, you forget there is the agony column, and the old maid's corner."

"Ah! so I have," rejoined Violet, "and Mr. Daniel is sometimes so amused at those curious insertions in the agony column, and has a friend who puts an oddly worded one in for fun occasionally."

"Here is a mark!" exclaimed Miss Faversham. "Births, marriages, deaths," murmured she, then turning to Violet, she added, gently, "I see it is among the deaths, my dear. Are you prepared for bad news? or shall I keep the paper until to-morrow?"

"Oh! please no, Miss Faversham. Suspense would be so much worse than the reality. Besides," added Violet, "I have no near relatives or kind friends beyond *you*, Miss

Jane, and Mr. Daniel, whom I should greatly lament over."

"Wilful woman must have her way, then, I can't stop any longer, so good night," replied Miss Faversham, handing Violet the supplement, and walking away with her candle.

"On the 21st inst., at Sandown, I.W., after a short illness, Marian Edith, wife of Robert Maitland Manvers, Esq., of Castle Manvers, Westlandshire, in her 41st year."

After Violet Vernon had read this she went to bed with her mind a very whirlpool of thought.





CHAPTER VII.

“FIDELITAS VINCIT.”

“To thine own self be true—
And it must follow as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

SHAKESPEARE.

AFTER the death of his wife, Robert Manvers soon proved he had not forgotten his sentiment for Violet. Mrs. Manvers had objected to being buried in the private cemetery at Crookly, and had left orders for her remains to be interred in her father's family vault, in the county of Norfolk; so after these, her last wishes had been executed, Robert Manvers wrote to Mrs. Knight, as being the most likely person who would have a clue to Violet Vernon's whereabouts. In this, how-

ever, he was mistaken, as she had ceased to correspond with her friend, and was only able to suggest the same she had done on a former occasion, namely, to make enquiries about Violet through Mr. Daniel, whom he could find by means of his club in London. Robert Manvers acted on this advice, but found to his chagrin that Mr. Daniel had been absent from Town for some weeks. The porter at the club was, however, able to give him the address of the agents, and from the senior partner, a Mr. Wright, he learnt that Mr. Daniel had been spending the whole of the summer and part of the autumn in Scotland, but had left a week ago for Brussels, where he intended to remain for some weeks.

Robert Manvers, impatient of delay, wrote a few lines to be forwarded through the agents, describing his present position, and the wish he had for an interview with Miss Vernon, in order to make the same proposals now which he had made a year and a half previously,

with the great difference, that before he was fettered but was now free. What a volume of meaning to Robert Manvers there was expressed in that one word—*Free!*

* * * * *

Months have flitted by. Spring has been succeeded by summer, and summer has given place to autumn, until the year comes round again to winter.

It is a raw day in early January, and the ground is white with snow, which fell during the previous night. Cold and bleak outside, with a cutting east wind enough to chill one to the bone, the atmosphere is not quite so severe as to freeze the affections of Violet Vernon and Robert Manvers, who are sitting over a cheerful fire in Miss Faversham's little dining-room at Brighton.

They are engaged to be married, and in another month the wedding bells are to proclaim her Robert Manvers' wife. They are

now spending a few hours together previous to a temporary absence, as to-morrow he starts for Germany to bring back his daughters, Edith and Maud, who are at school there, as he wishes them to be present at their marriage.

What are the thoughts that are running in the minds of these two, as they muse together over the cheerful, blazing hearth? Theirs are hearts which have been purified with sorrows, and made acquainted with grief. They have fought bravely the trials which have beset their life paths, and though sometimes vanquished, they have not been dismayed. Both have missed their goal of expectation—the union of Love's affinity in early youth. But one reconciles himself to this, because he fancies he has attained it now, whilst the other feels only too keenly that her present hope will be but a consolation prize, since she has lost the great race—the Derby blue ribbon of her life.

Still she is happy, with that tranquility which belongs to the more mature years of womanhood, when it has lost all the feverish disquietude of youth, and when joy no longer fills the heart with its gladsome array, which it expends in effusive spirits. For has not her life been one chastened by suffering, and her mind one always encumbered with thought?

Above all, has she not been laden with a burthen at which the heart has lost all power to rebel? and which has long taught her to regard death as the only haven which affords the weary traveller rest. Judge not of faces if you cannot also fathom hearts.

* * * * *

Does Violet love this man she is about to marry? Nay, Robert Manvers knows she will never love him as she loves the cherished memory of that other, who is still the idol of her heart.

And still, knowing this, his great wish is

to make her his wife ; for to him Violet is the embodiment of divinity in earthly form ! her voice to him is as the echo of a cherubim in Heaven, and it is as though an angel had bedewed him with kisses, when her lips have met his own. She is as a star which leads him to the realms of celestial thought. Her presence is a rapture, and despondency steals over him when she is no longer nigh.

Yet this woman of his all-absorbing affection has denied him her heart, though she has consented to give her hand.

“ I haven’t it to give,” she had said. “ I lost it years ago.” And he had accepted these words with the woman he longed to make his wife, for had it not been his first thought to revenge the wrong done by the ruffian who had forsaken her ? And how better could he do this than by cherishing and loving that which the other had scorned ? But in renouncing all promises of love, he had exacted from her an oath to be made on the

landmark of her most hallowed memory, that in becoming his wife she was to honour and esteem him. And this she had sworn to do, and on what he knew to be her *religion*, namely, her first love. In exchange for her honour and esteem he had given her all, absolutely everything.

“All mine is thine, Violet,” he had murmured, after she had expressed her inability to bestow on him her heart.

Strange contract this, for man to make with woman. But then wasn't Violet the fairest flower that grew in his mind's field? And because *one* had ruthlessly crushed out its fragrance and left its beauty unseen, why should *he* again disdain it? Because it had the blemish of neglect? Blemish, indeed! The blemish was on the character of *him* who had passed it by.

“Violet, my own darling Violet! may your memory of me be ever green, and freshened with the roseate hues and dew of my

fidelity ! My love ! the one fond, dear one of my life ! Denied a being whom I could love in youth, I shall cherish and value all the more that good fortune which brings thee to comfort me in my latter days."





CHAPTER VIII.

COLONEL DIOGENES.

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

LORD BYRON.

VIOLET, since her engagement, has given up teaching Mrs. Wallace's little girl, but not many days pass without her seeing something of her late pupil.

A day or two after Robert Manvers left for Germany; Mrs. Wallace came to call on the Misses Faversham, and to ask Violet to accompany herself and cousin to the theatre on the following evening, as a good London company were to act in Lord Lytton's drama, "The Lady of Lyons."

Miss Faversham at first wished Violet to decline, as she feared her catching cold in a draughty theatre. But on Mrs. Wallace assuring her that she would take every care of Miss Vernon, and see that she was well wrapped up both before leaving and on returning to her house, besides impressing on Miss Faversham that she had no intention of remaining for the afterpiece so that they would be back quite early, she at length yielded to these persuasions.

* * * * *

When Violet reached the Wallaces on the evening of the drama, it was dark, with the street lamps lighted. Miss Jane escorted her to her destination, and then went back.

In the drawing-room Violet found Mrs. Wallace, already dressed, sitting by a cheerful fire.

“Do you object to this darkness, Miss Vernon, because if so, I will ring for lights,”

said she, after first greetings had been exchanged.

"I love sitting in a room with only the light of the fire, and as we shall be going into dinner almost directly, I fancied it was hardly worth while."

"Then, please, do not have the room lighted on my account, for I am very fond of it too," replied Violet, taking the chair which Mrs. Wallace had placed near her own by the fire.

"My husband thinks it so dismal, that I can very rarely indulge in this fancy of mine, but he is dining out this evening with some very old friends who have lately turned up in Brighton, and intends going with them to the theatre, so we shall meet him there. Mr. Wallace is going to try and keep me a seat near those friends, so perhaps you will not mind sitting alone with my cousin, who, I fear, you will not find very agreeable, though he is extremely good looking. He commands the

regiment that has lately come here, the Prince Alfred Hussars, and is nicknamed by his brother officers Col. Diogenes, which hasn't a very fascinating sound, has it, Miss Vernon? Nevertheless, this cousin of mine can make himself very charming when the spirit moves him, and is reported to be a great lady killer. But he ought to be here by this time," continued Mrs. Wallace, pulling out her watch and examining it by the fire light. "It is six o'clock, and he promised to be here at the quarter to."

"I fancy I hear a carriage now drawing up at the door," observed Violet, moving her chair a few paces from the fire.

"Yes, that must be him," replied her friend. "Now I wonder what kind of humour Diogenes is in this evening, as I always take it out of him in chaff when he brings a bad one."

At this moment the door opened, and a tall, well-built man entered.

“Just a quarter of an hour behind your time, Harold; account for your unpunctuality,” said Mrs. Wallace, shaking her cousin warmly by the hand, and leading him to the chair previously occupied by Violet, who had retreated to the sofa with a fire screen before her, which completely shaded her face. She started, as she heard Mrs. Wallace call this stranger *Harold*. She never could hear this name without associating it with *her* Harold of by-gone days. How foolish it was of her when there were, of course, so many other Harolds in the world, besides the one who had once been all in all to her. Yet, in consequence of this coincidence, Violet scanned the face of this new comer with greater interest and curiosity than she would otherwise have done.

“I was telling my friend all about you just before you arrived,” continued Mrs. Wallace. “Let me introduce you—Col. Diogenes, Miss Vernon.”

Violet felt herself trembling in every limb, and flushing to the roots of her hair, as she bowed behind her screen. How thankful she felt that the room was thus dimly lighted. Violet's name or presence made little difference to Col. Diogenes, possibly he had not even correctly heard the former. At all events, after his formal bow, he took no further notice of her, but drew his chair close up to the fire, and commenced talking with his cousin.

"You are almost in darkness, had I not better make up the fire?" said he, taking the tongs and turning a log of wood the reverse side, in order to make it burn more cheerfully. A blaze burst from the disturbed wood and lit up the whole of his face, and, in his handsome, bronzed features, with the dark eyes, heavy moustache, and bald forehead, Violet Vernon, in her fixed rapt gaze, discovered the man of her affections—Harold Trevelyan. Was it a vision? Was it a

dream ? Or was it a reality ? That in this dark drawing-room, after the lapse of all these years, her old love should be thus sitting near her, with his feet on the fender of the fireplace, touching the skirt of her dress. Did he feel that she was near him ? Were his feelings strung like hers ? Did her presence cause him the same emotions his did her ? She thought not. Why should they ? She was nothing to him, he did not care for her. How was it that the burning gaze of her eyes, rivetted as they were upon him, did not move him from his forgetfulness ? Violet could not have spoken one word, if her life had depended upon it, yet Harold was conversing with his cousin with the same cool indifference concerning her presence, which he had manifested from the beginning. The spell of her reflections was broken by the man servant entering to announce that dinner was on the table. Mrs. Wallace rose from her chair.

"Harold," said she, "we are a party of three, so you must do donkey and paniers, and take one of us on each arm into dinner."

As Violet placed her trembling hand on his coat sleeve, was Harold Trevelyan still unconscious of who the frail delicate girl really was who walked beside him? In the dining-room the brilliant gas dazzled her eyes, and Violet, feeling unnerved at having to sit directly opposite to Harold, was anything but comfortable at so much light.

"Why, my dear Miss Vernon, how dreadfully pale you are; you cannot be feeling well!" exclaimed Mrs. Wallace, regarding Violet with a look of concern, "Harold, you had better pour her out a glass of wine."

Attracted by the sudden remarks of his cousin, Harold, after pouring out the wine, stared at the pale girl before him. Violet felt his eyes were upon her, but managed to stammer out—

"I am quite well, thank you. I shall be

right enough after I have eaten something. It is only a momentary faintness."

Her voice recalls to him a past. Yet can that pale face, with those sunken eyes, and wasted form be the Violet of former days? How like she was to the picture he had seen in Rome! Her name, too, was the same. But how was it she had not become Mrs. Daniel? "The world has evidently not treated her very kindly," thought Harold, "for sorrow is engraved on every feature of her melancholy face." Violet swallowed the wine he handed to her, and in some measure recovered.

"How does your regiment like Brighton, Harold? Is it generally rather a favourite quarter," observed Mrs. Wallace, intentionally breaking the silence that had been caused by Violet's faintness.

"I fancy some of the fellows grumble at the expense and that sort of thing; but I have always enough and to spare, so trouble very little about the places they send us to."

There was a harsher tone in Harold's voice as he said these words, and a severe bitterness in his expression, which had not been so apparent in his face before. His cousin remarked the selfishness of his speech, but made no comment upon it, and inquired—

“Don't you think there are a great many pretty girls here?”

“If there are, I haven't had the luck to see them,” he replied, contemptuously. “Distance only lends enchantment to the view of all I have come across. Good walking advertisements for all “Arabian perfumers to the Queen,” and deceptions within and without,” added he, with a sneer.

“Fie, Harold! How can you make such unkind remarks! You will quite shock Miss Vernon. I see you are in one of your worst humours; however,” continued Mrs. Wallace, rather satirically, “you know my opinion. I have always said you have been jilted by some fair maid, and this accounts for your spite against the sex.” It was rather a sore hit,

but he bore it manfully, and without moving a muscle.

"Yes," said he, carelessly, "I have been jilted, but now I have learnt that two can play at the same game, and am more than a match for the jilts themselves."

"What a confession for a man to make!" exclaimed his cousin; at the same time lifting her eyes by way of a second ejaculation. "To me, it is a wonder any girls can trouble about such a detestable cynic."

"Women have made me what I am," returned Harold, bitterly, "and if I may judge from the number of invitations they beset me with, they appear to be well satisfied with their handiwork. But I want none of their society, and if the dowagers fancy Diogenes will make a fit *parti* for their painted daughters, they will angle for him in vain, for he has learnt wisdom from woman's folly."

"Really, Harold, I cannot endure your re-

marks this evening. It is not polite of you to say such things in our presence. I can see you have quite depressed poor Miss Vernon."

"I am very sorry to be the one to enlighten Miss Vernon on the frailties of her sex; but I doubt whether *she* even believes in such a thing as a constant woman. For my part, I am inclined to question its existence, though, like the sea serpent, some few tell us they have met with one."

"You must have come in contact with only very bad women then, Harold," remarked his cousin.

"Oh, no! I assure you most charming creatures! Quite angel faces, with divine eyes, that could throw you any amount of loving glances. Women that quite led you to suppose you had found a nugget, but their beauty all turned out to be tinsel. Depend upon it a man can rarely do better than fight a woman with her own weapons; and it is a

fine thing for him to use successfully their sword of deceit, and protect himself from attack by wearing their armour of delusion."

"And I should say an attainment well worthy of belonging to the ambitious philosophy of Diogenes," remarked Mrs. Wallace, with a touch of sarcasm.

So this was Harold Trevelyan ! This bitter cynic, who hadn't a good word to say of any one or anything ! And this the man who, had daily occupied Violet Vernon's thoughts ; absorbed her whole affection, and had constituted her one extatic life dream. This was the man whose loss she had mourned all these years ! How could she have ever loved so devotedly this cold hard-hearted man of the world, who scorned at virtue and ridiculed vice ? Never had her love appeared less attractive in her eyes than this evening ; and for the first time in her life she weighed Harold in the balance with Robert Manvers, and found the lover of her youth *wanting*.

He appeared to Violet as a man indifferent to all affection, and with a scornful, derisive contempt for all that was great and noble, capable of inflicting marked unkindness by the bitter tone of his cutting sarcasms and covert sneers, but totally devoid of all remorse.

Heartless, cold, and cynical, he was yet fascinating and attractive in his outward appearance, which made him the more dangerous, because, ruthless and wanton in his pitiless actions, he was himself insensible to the sufferings he inflicted. Such appeared to be the man whom she had so faithfully loved! This was he who had first planted the myrtle in her breast, and had then left her to nourish it in grief, and water it with her tears.

Harold's conversation, as Mrs. Wallace had rightly observed, was depressing to Violet, and she no longer looked forward to witnessing the play, since, in all probability, she would have to sit alone with him, and

hear a second edition of his ill-natured remarks.

She was beginning to feel an indescribable sensation of antipathy towards him, and on the way to the theatre, she made a faint effort to show Mrs. Wallace she would prefer having a seat next to her if it could be managed, instead of being with her cousin, as had been previously arranged.

The curtain was up, and the actors in "The Lady of Lyons" were in the second scene of the first act, in which Beauseant and Glavis concoct their malicious revenge on Pauline, as Harold, Violet, and Mrs. Wallace entered the dress circle. Mr. Wallace, on seeing his wife, came forward and drew her attention to a seat he had been keeping for her near their friends, at the same time pointing out two chairs which had been reserved for Colonel Trevelyan and Miss Vernon a little further off.

Mrs. Wallace, in the little excitement oc-

casioned by her meeting these old friends, whom she had not encountered for years, forgot about Violet, who was consequently obliged to follow her companion, and accept the chair which had been provided for her.

A secret satisfaction took possession of Harold as he grasped the situation. He was to sit alone with this girl who had trifled with his feelings, had scorned his love, and made him the cynic he had now become. But to-night he would take his revenge. Now was his opportunity to rake up the past, and bring her to the blush, by exposing her base conduct.

"I will tease and annoy her with some more sarcasm," thought he, "and I will scoff at all she either approves or admires.

" 'With witty malice studious to defame;
Scorn all his joy, and laughter all his aim.' "

Yet, as Harold looked at the pensive face of Violet near him, he could not resist a little feeling of compunction at behaving in

this manner towards her. The girl looked so different to what he fancied she was, and he began to wonder at such a hollow heart beating beneath such thoughtful, sad-looking eyes.

“Ever seen ‘The Lady of Lyons’ before, Miss Vernon?” enquired he, looking vacantly before him, and pulling the long hairs of his moustache.

“No, never!” replied Violet, nervously opening and closing her fan, “but I have read the story, and like it very much. I am very fond of all Lord Lytton’s works. I suppose you have seen this piece often before?”

“Not this one, but fifty others like it. These plays are all one and the same thing to me. I suppose this one ends with that *rara avis*, a constant woman, and all that sort of thing?” replied Harold, contemptuously. “What is that fellow doing now?” enquired he, referring to Claude Melnotte, who had

just drawn aside the curtain to look on his picture of Pauline.

"He is gazing on the portrait of her whom he loves," replied Violet. "Claude is in love with a woman above him in station. She is the daughter of the wealthiest merchant in Lyons, whilst he is only a gardener's son."

"What does that matter, Miss Vernon?" enquired he, assuming ignorance of the *convenable*. "Love knows no class distinctions. It has never been aristocratic. The poor are at liberty to wed the rich, and it is surely only the *parvenu* who terms such an arrangement a *mésalliance*," added he, with an ironical smile, and then continued in the same tone of voice, "This poor dupe, Melnotte, fancies, I suppose, this Pauline loves him, by his painting her portrait?"

"I don't quite follow your reasoning which leads you to assert this, Colonel Trevelyan," replied Violet, warmly. She was beginning to lose all patience with this inclina-

tion of his to turn everything the wrong way. " Claude is much too conscious of the lowliness of his birth to be the least sure of Pauline's love. He only lives in hopes of it, and writes her love letters, which are rejected in a manner which wounds his pride, and makes him a willing tool of a base revenge, which leads him into marrying her under the assumed name and position of the Prince of Como."

" Indeed, Miss Vernon ; then the plot is not at all so bad. ' Fine feathers always make fine birds,' and Lord Lytton displays his knowledge of the feminine character if he makes this woman accept the same man in the garb of a prince, who she scornfully rejects in the honest, but humble, position of the peasant. But I suppose," added Harold, sneeringly, " there is a good deal of balderdash mixed up in the results of this marriage? What I mean to say is, I think I can guess the end of this piece. This Claude Melnotte is, of course,

going to be very lavish in his virtues. In fact, he is quite a novelist's hero, and a prince in morals, though only the gardener's son in worldly substance. I dare say this brave fellow gives up all claim to Pauline on account of his marrying her under these false pretences; and then, probably, after passing through a series of adventures unparalleled in the world's annals, he returns laden with honours, which he humbly lays at the feet of faithful Pauline. Now, have I not guessed right, Miss Vernon? Is not this the finale in 'The Lady of Lyons?'"

His tone of voice was so triumphantly scoffing, and he appeared to take such a keen delight in displaying his contempt for all that which he perceived she admired, that Violet, quite provoked at his manner, did not deign a reply.

"Do you know, Miss Vernon," he went on, touching her arm to attract her attention, "I was in love once. It is many years ago,

and it happened at Nice. Do you know Nice ? ” Harold looked at Violet with a hard set expression as he asked this, and was satisfied, by a slightly impatient gesture she made, that his question had told upon her, so, assuming a very careless tone, he resumed : “ Well, at Nice, I was very much in love with a girl, or, at least, I thought I was then, which is much the same thing, and proposed to her. As well as I can recollect—for mind you, Miss Vernon, all this didn’t happen yesterday ; my impression is that I was accepted, and, as she had to leave Nice for England about the same time I was leaving that place for Rome we promised to correspond. I fancy I must have been rather far gone on this girl, because, I remember, that when I reached Rome, I could not get her out of my thoughts. I was putting up with an artist there, who had painted a picture of a flower girl. It was rather a pretty face, and, of course, my love-sick imagina-

tion conjured up a likeness to this figure on the canvas and the girl I had known at Nice, and I couldn't rest until I took up a brush, and endeavoured to copy this picture. You see I was something like Claude Melnotte, but please don't set me down as a great hero, because I am nothing of the kind, and this little love episode of mine ends in a manner totally different from this play. But I must go on with my story. Let me see," he mused, with a sinister expression playing about the corners of his mouth, "I was telling you about my painting the picture when I interrupted myself. Well, this picture was a failure ; do what I would, I couldn't catch the expression in the eyes, which constituted the chief likeness between the flower girl and she whom I loved ; so, by way of consoling me for my non-success, my friend gave me a miniature which had done duty as the model for his picture. This miniature is about the size of a small watch, and I always carry it in the

right pocket of my waistcoat, in order to remind me of this foolish love affair, and guard me against having any other. If you have any curiosity to see this likeness, Miss Vernon, I can show it to you, for I am wearing it now. I think you will consider it a pretty face," added he, drawing from his pocket the miniature Vincent Grey had given him, and, with a malicious triumph on his face, holding it before the eyes of his trembling victim. Poor Violet ! There was something diabolically cruel in the whole situation ! She could have burst into tears, had not pride, and the fear of attracting public attention in the theatre, restrained her.

"Look at it, Miss Vernon," repeated Harold, finding she kept her eyes rivetted on the stage, as though attracted by the movements of the actors. "Is it not a pretty face ?" persisted he, still holding the miniature before her.

Violet could stand it no longer, she yielded

to his persecuting solicitations, turned and looked. She then started ! and with a gasp which suppressed a cry, she exclaimed—

“ It is my mother ! ”

“ Your mother, Miss Vernon ! ” replied Harold, amazed and disconcerted in his turn, at this most unexpected coincidence. “ Impossible ! ” added he, “ My friend’s father picked it up in New York years ago.”

“ Which only adds another proof to my first assertion. My father died in New York,” rejoined Violet, bitterly.

“ Indeed, Miss Vernon ! how very strange ! I had no idea—I mean it is one of the last things I expected, to find you and I had a link with the past,” said Harold, ironically, and then with rude familiarity, he commenced to stare in Violet’s face, and then back to the miniature, by way of comparing the two faces. “ Now I come to think about it, there is a resemblance to you in this,” he went on, “ in fact, a very marked likeness. Look at these

eyes again, Miss Vernon, and tell me if you don't think them like yours?"

How Violet loathed him! She perfectly hated him for the gross insults he had showered upon her.

"Colonel Trevelyan, your conduct is both cowardly and ungentlemanly!" she exclaimed, passionately, the tears starting into her eyes, at the bitter humiliation he had caused her during the evening.

"My dear Miss Vernon, believe me I meant no offence," he replied, pretending to be quite horrified at the gravity of his mistake, and hastening to apologise. "Forgive me for having very unintentionally offended you, but really it is such an awfully strange occurrence, this miniature in my possession turning out to be your mother, that I think you might consider my curiosity in some degree pardonable. More especially," added he, with a slight sneer, "when you take into consideration the little love episode in my life, which led to my possessing it."

Violet turned from him in disgust. Her wounded pride would condescend to notice him no further. But she was not destined to enjoy any peace, as long as she remained at the mercy of her persecutor.

“What are they doing on the stage now, Miss Vernon? I wish you would be amiable enough to enlighten me,” said he, in rather an aggrieved tone. “Pauline is going to divorce herself from her Prince Charming, since she discovers him to be only the gardener’s son, and then, I take it, this Beauseant again comes forward as a suitor for her hand. I think the piece would have been more natural, if it had allowed him to obtain it, for the fellow is a far better specimen than that fop the Prince of Como.”

Violet, who had been unable to pay the least attention to the play, owing to the prolonged interruptions, which had been of a nature to entirely distract her thoughts, but who knew the results of the story from having

read it many times before, and had always greatly admired the characters of Claude Melnotte and Pauline, could not resist giving an indignant retort to Harold's previous observation.

"Beauseant is quite unworthy of Pauline," she replied, hotly. "But he gets his deserts in the end, Colonel Trevelyan, and finds he is check-mated when he thinks he has castled his queen."

"I don't quite understand you, Miss Vernon. Your language is too enigmatical. But since the piece ends with the stale old joke of a constant woman, I have ceased to take any great interest in it," replied Harold, contemptuously.

"Lord Lytton has carried out his drama in a manner which is in every way desirable," returned Violet, warmly, "he makes Pauline a noble hearted constant heroine, and Claude Melnotte a hero in every respect worthy of her affections."

"I am glad you are so pleased with it, Miss Vernon, but you must think it does not depict natural characters, and is a fairy tale on the realities of life. I can see you still differ from me," added he, maliciously, "but if you will allow me to tell you the remainder of my own love affair, you may perhaps be inclined to alter your opinion. So to make a long story short, I may as well tell you, I never again either saw, or heard from the girl I was in love with at Nice. Of course, she never fulfilled her promise about writing to me. I thought it very strange and heartless of her at the time, but now that I understand women so well, I believe it was perfectly natural, and so also is what follows, which is that in less than a fortnight after the time we separated at Nice, this old love of mine had engaged to become a rich old man's darling, instead of remaining the darling of a young man's heart. But I don't blame her," added Harold, with bitter indifference, "I

was poor at that time, and could not have afforded to marry her for some years perhaps. So I can hardly wonder at her throwing me over for a richer man. It was all quite natural, and this other lover was a very old friend of hers, a Mr. Daniel, her name was—*Violet Vernon !*”

* * * * *

At length Harold Trevelyan had reached the climax of his revenge, and Violet, struck dumb by his insulting audacity, was perfectly incapacitated from uttering one word which would defend herself and refute his calumnious statements, so that Harold for some minutes mistook her silence and the excessive paleness of her face, for shame proceeding from the consciousness of guilt.

“Colonel Trevelyan, you have disgraced your manhood!” she exclaimed in tones, quivering with emotion. “You are a base dishonourable coward to sneer at the un-

fortunate weakness of a woman, who you so inhumanly robbed of her affections, and now cast them back into her teeth with scorn."

"You lie!" he muttered savagely, endeavouring to smother an oath which gurgled in his throat, for fear of attracting the notice of people sitting near them. "You lie," he repeated viciously, "because you never answered my letters, and you were engaged to Mr. Daniel."

Violet stared at him, as one who had lost her reason; then her lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and with a woe-begone reproachful face, which haunted Harold to his dying day—

"Oh, Harold! what have I done to make you say such cruel bitter things to me?"

"You deny it?" ejaculated he, fiercely. "You say it is all a falsehood! You know that what I have said is all true," he added, passionately, feeling almost beside himself, by the dawn of a thought that he had been

perhaps wronging her. "You ask me why I am cruel enough to take this bitter revenge on you ! But your heartless actions are alone responsible for mine, since it was your infidelity which caused me to become the hateful cynic that I am. It was you who first taught me to despise love, and tutored me into a contempt for virtue. Reap, then, the bitter harvest you have sown, for what I *am* you have made me !"

"Harold, Harold, if you are a man, desist for Heaven's sake from making any more of these wrong assertions. You will drive me mad !" cried Violet, piteously. "How can you mock thus at one who has so loved you ?"

"Love me !" he exclaimed, wildly. "You love me, *you* !" added he, clasping her hand, and crushing it fiercely within his own. "Is this a dream ? Or has it all been some foul plot and ignoble mistake ? Speak, Violet, speak, and quell this demon of suspicion

which rages like an unconquerable fury in my breast." He turned on Violet for an answer, but her over-wrought nervous system could stand the tension of her feelings no longer, and she had fallen back on her chair insensible. Harold raised her tenderly in his arms, and just when Claude Melnotte as Colonel Morier, the hero of Lodi, had rushed across the stage to tear the contract, and lay down the ransom to free Pauline from the grasp of Beauseant, Colonel Trevelyan bore Violet Vernon fainting from the theatre.

* * * * *

Harold's brain was in a mad whirl of confusion, after leaving Violet at her home. It was very late before he reached the barracks, for, in order to give vent to his emotions, after the excitement of the evening, he had walked in the direction of the beach, and sitting down on the cliff, he buried his face

in his hands, and gave way to his passionate tumultuous feelings. The night wind was cold, but he heeded it not. The damp sea breeze moistened the soft curls beneath his hat, and the spray occasionally dashed against his clothes, but he was too absorbed musing over the memories of the past, to notice any of these trifles. How had it all happened, he wondered. If Violet had been true—and he no longer doubted she had been—who had caused the vile suspicion of doubting her love? And who was the author of those diabolical lies, which had caused the severance of two such united hearts? What object could any one have in prejudicing his mind against this woman whom he had so devotedly loved, and, which this night proved, had been so faithful to him, despite the cruel wrong he had done her? In conjecturing and speculating on probabilities and possibilities, Harold, at the end of his musings, was no nearer the thread which disentangled this web of

mystery, than he was when he first sat down to ponder over all that had happened. What a bitter remorse stung him to the soul, when he recalled the cynical, cruel remarks he had made to the poor little faithful darling of his heart, during the evening.

“Poor little Violet,” he murmured, brushing away with his saturated handkerchief fresh tears which started to his eyes. “Poor little forsaken one! remaining true in her love for me all these years. How could I have said such brutal things to her with that pretty sad face, and with her dear eyes having such a mournful appeal in them, that they might have turned a stone to pity! Poor little constant, faithful Violet! I wonder who the accursed being was who taught me to distrust thee? Oh, God!” he suddenly exclaimed, wringing his hands like one in torture, as a dark thought flashed across his bewildered brain, “Can it be my own familiar friend who has done this foul

deed ? Can it be the woman who boasted she advised me as a mother ? Can it be Lucy Weston who has thus sacrificed the happiness of fond hearts to indulge deceitful Florence by hanging one more fool to the chariot wheels of her Triumphal Car ? Oh ! can it be for only this ? ” he cried in the anguish of his soul. “ I shall not be able to rest until I have fathomed the whole of this dark mystery. I will see Violet to-morrow ; tell her all I know, and hear from her own sweet lips, all that took place between our joy days at Nice, and the sorrows which overtook us after that mournful farewell.

Stiff and cold, with a haggard careworn face, and with his manly form bowed down with the severity of his nocturn grief, the dashing Colonel of the Prince Alfred Hussars reached his quarters, wearied out with the mental sufferings he had endured on the Brighton cliffs. The cynic had ceased to sneer, and Diogenes had for once lost faith in his own philosophy.



CHAPTER IX.

TREVELYAN V. MANVERS.

*" Mine honour is my life ; both grow in one,
Take honour from me, and my life is done."*

" Richard II."

At twelve o'clock on the following day, Col. Trevelyan knocked at the door of the Misses Faversham's small dwelling, and enquired of the servant whether he might be permitted to have an interview with Miss Vernon. To his surprise and alarm, he learnt that Violet was in bed, and had passed such a bad night, that a doctor had been sent for early that morning, who had given strict orders to keep Miss Vernon as quiet as possible, and to withhold from her knowledge for the present, everything which would be likely to increase

her uneasy state of mental excitement. In a very anxious frame of mind, Harold asked permission to see the other ladies, and on this message being delivered to Miss Faversham, she sent back an answer granting his request. His conversation with Miss Eliza lasted over half an hour, and was rather of a formal character. But Col. Trevelyan's handsome appearance, together with his courteous affable manners, left such a good impression on Miss Faversham, that she could talk of little else during the rest of the day than of her admiration for this stranger.

Miss Faversham somewhat relieved Harold's anxious mind concerning Violet's illness.

"Miss Vernon has a highly nervous, excitable temperament," said she, giving her own opinion on the subject. "I was very much averse to her going to the theatre, because I know her to be anything but strong, and that trifles frequently upset her. I hope Mrs. Wallace has not been

making herself very unhappy about Miss Vernon, because, I assure you, Col. Trevelyan, it is by no means an infrequent occurrence for this poor child to remain two or three days together in bed. Miss Vernon has suffered many trials, which have weakened her constitution; she used to be such a strong, robust girl years ago, when she was a pupil at our seminary in Kent. I must say," continued Miss Faversham, perceiving she had an attentive listener in Harold, "that my sister and I were at first rather alarmed last night by the child's delirious talk, and the wild confusion in which she mixed up your name with the characters in the play. You say, Col. Trevelyan, you were a great friend of Violet's many years ago, possibly your unexpected appearance may have had something to do with this sudden attack," added she, eyeing her visitor rather suspiciously.

"I think you are correct in your sugges-

tion," replied Harold, colouring slightly. "I am sorry to say I plead guilty to having been in a great measure the cause of Miss Vernon's present suffering, and the consciousness of this brought me early to your house for the purpose of making enquiries. I most unkindly and injudiciously raked up last night many painful reminiscences, which I wish to heaven I had left slumbering, seeing the mischief they have caused; and yet not exactly *slumbering*," added he, correcting himself, "because by awakening these sorrowful memories, I made a discovery, which gladdened my heart. I cannot explain, Miss Faversham, the subject we discussed, because I could not describe clearly this affair, until I have had an interview with Miss Vernon, and elucidated certain facts, which are at present to me rather dark mysteries. I should, therefore, be extremely obliged, if you would permit me to converse with Miss Vernon as soon as possible, because I feel

suspense will be as injurious to her speedy recovery, as it is agony to my feelings, so that the sooner we dispose of our doubts and fears, the better."

"He has *loved* her," thought Miss Faversham, "I wonder whether he knows that she is engaged to Robert Manvers. It will never do for me to tell him. The blow had best come from herself, more especially as there is so much in all this which I do not understand. It might lead me into saying more than caution would suggest. Whatever there may be to explain had best come from themselves, other tongues meddling in the matter may bring misfortune on us all." Thus reasoned Miss Faversham, who was wise in her generation; and if some of the officious people in this world would take a hint and hold their peace on matters which are beyond their ken, or which it were better to leave unsaid, one half the irreparable errors which happen in life would be blotted from the tablets of

sorrow. When Harold rose to take leave of Miss Faversham, she was unable to appoint any fixed time for him to have his interview with Violet, as she considered it would be better to wait a few days, to enable her nerves to recover from the severe shock they had received.

In this Harold concurred, though suspense was maddening to him. Still for Violet's sake he was willing to endure anything. So on quitting the house he informed Miss Faversham that he should call at her door every day to enquire after Miss Vernon's state of progression, and that if she would kindly give the servant warning on the day he was to be admitted, or drop him a line addressed to the barracks, he should then feel sure of acting with the doctor's and her own approval.

* * * * *

Nearly a week has passed away since the night at the theatre, and though Harold has

been each day to make his enquiries, accompanied by a bouquet of flowers, or a basket of choice fruit, he has, as yet, received no invitation to see Violet. He is becoming impatient and anxious at this prolonged delay, for the bulletin received from the servant fluctuates, and more than once the accounts have been far from favourable. One day, especially, Violet appeared so languid and apathetic that Miss Jane, who had been all along her most devoted nurse, suggested telegraphing for Robert Manvers, but her patient implored her to do nothing more than write, telling him she was only slightly indisposed, and the amiable little woman had obeyed her. Nevertheless, this letter from the youngest Miss Faversham, caused some anxiety to Robert Manvers, and determined his return to England with his daughters three days earlier than he had originally intended. Violet, in her bedroom, found the days very wearisome when she gained strength, and still found the doctor

forbade her interview with Harold. As her mind became clarified, and learnt to realize the fact of there being an incomprehensible misadventure belonging to the past, which she could only attribute to the actions of malevolent persons bent on separating Harold from herself, she trembled at the thoughts of seeing him again ; yet it was the one thing she pined for with her whole heart. To see Harold and then die became almost her prayer, for what had she to live for afterwards ! To know he understood and appreciated her fidelity was her conception of an ideal climax. The one thing she hoped and lived for, and for which her whole soul thirsted, was this interview with Harold. She yearned for it to take place before the return of Robert Manvers, and in three or four days more he was to be with her. She dared not think what was likely to happen afterwards, but in her present weak state of health, she cared for little beyond the joy she

would experience from Harold's acknowledging her devotion. In this she was not acting treacherously to Robert Manvers, for her love had formed no part of the contract she had made with him, seeing he had agreed to take her hand, and leave her heart free to remain true to its own object of affection. Poor little Violet ! destined to enjoy one more ray of sunshine before another dark cloud comes to extinguish the light of joy from your trusting heart ! Poor hapless little wanderer ! You, who have fought the world so valiantly, and battled with the stormy seas of life so bravely, have yet to buckle on your armour for one more great struggle before reaching that haven of repose where the weary are at rest !

* * * * *

Again Harold Trevelyan is with Violet. He found her in the dining-room wrapped in a warm Shetland shawl, near the fire, in the

same place where she had sat one fortnight before with Robert Manvers, previous to his setting out for Germany. Her face is deadly pale, and the mental anxiety she has suffered has so wasted her form, that without her clothes she is little better than a skeleton. Her large eyes are brilliant with excitement, and as Harold grasped her thin, nervous, little hand, and covered it with passionate kisses as he crushed it against his breast, she trembled like a falling leaf. All doubts of insincerity had vanished from both minds, and for some time they forgot all else, as in a locked embrace both drank deeply the nectar of an all absorbing felicity, and *soul* communed with *soul*.

“Tell me all about it, my darling,” murmured Harold, when their first overwhelming emotions had somewhat subsided. “Tell me, my own dear one, how our cruel separation happened, and how this unkind world treated you during all these long years?” And seat-

ing himself near Violet, with his arm round her waist, he listened to the soft, tremulous tones of her voice which fell upon his ear like the sweet wail of an *Æolian* harp as she related the adventures of her chequered life. The dark conjecture which had crossed Harold's mind on the cliff concerning the treachery of Mrs. Weston, became confirmed beyond all doubt by Violet drawing from her bosom the one letter she had received from Rome, which she had attributed to his heartless infidelity. Suspicion made his eyes keen critics, and in the handwriting on the rumpled envelope Harold recognised the disguised calligraphy of his designing friend. "We have been the victims of a foul plot, Violet," said he, sternly, as a black scowl crossed his brow, and a glitter of revenge flashed in his dark eyes. "What a fool I have been not to place implicit trust in the goodness of your heart, my dear one, I should then have saved myself the humiliation of being an unhappy

dupe and the believer of lies, and saved you, my own dear little woman, from crying out all the gladness in those pretty eyes of yours. What made you keep this cruel letter, Violet?" enquired he, tenderly stroking her soft hair. "I wonder the vile thing could lay all these years near such a constant, loving heart."

"I had so few things of yours, Harold, only a book and one real love letter, and then *this*, which I bore as my cross."

"Let me have the horrid thing, darling, since it was never mine you will no longer value it."

"Why don't you burn it?" she enquired, observing he placed it carefully in his breast pocket.

"Because it will be a useful witness when I challenge Mrs. Weston for her audacity in tampering with our letters, and for causing us these years of misery," he replied, fiercely. "I can never forget this fraud, Violet, never,"

he pursued passionately, "neither will I ever forgive the woman who has done us this great injury! Thank God! my darling, our lives are spared to redeem this wrong, though the wasted years are irrevocable. No treacherous Mrs. Weston shall part us now, my own dear one," added he, pressing Violet against his heart.

"It is too late!" she faltered, "I can never now be yours. I have taken an oath to wed another, Harold. I am engaged to Robert Manvers."

"Engaged to who?" he shouted, pale with jealousy. "Do you mean to tell me you will not be my wife? Why did you take an oath to marry this man of whom you speak when you say you love only me?" gasped Harold, overcome and quite bewildered at this most unexpected blow.

"Do not ask me! I cannot tell you! I have promised!" and bowing her head on his knees, she burst into tears.

“Violet, Violet, you will kill me!” he exclaimed in an agonised tone of voice. “Swear to cancel this oath, and marry only me! I, who so love thee! I, who have so long mourned thy loss! Fly with me, my own dear love, for I cannot live without thee! Promise me!” he entreated, seizing her face between his hands, and forcing her eyes to gaze into his as he fell on his knees before her. “Say you will be mine, *all mine*, dear Violet, and do not still more embitter my life with the curse of despair.”

“My darling Harold, I am powerless,” she cried, piteously. “My oath is too sacred to be broken, and what I owe in gratitude, I cannot be base enough to repay in dishonour. I have sworn to marry Robert Manvers, and it must be so.”

“Who is Robert Manvers?” he asked, fiercely. “Who is this man who dares to separate us? What claim has he to make you his when your love is all mine? Look

at me, my darling, and promise me not to be his; promise not," and he dragged her towards him as though to force an answer from her anguish, which he mistook for hesitation.

"I must! Harold, I must!"

"Must!" he shouted. "What is *must*?" and in a passionate fury of disgust he flung her from him.

Violet would have fallen had she not found herself suddenly supported by the strong arms of Robert Manvers, who, during the confusion of their struggling emotions had entered the room unobserved.

"What do you mean by this conduct, sir?" he cried, threateningly to Harold, who, though taken by surprise, held his ground like a man, and regarded the intruder with proud defiance. "Explain the object of this visit, and the meaning of these high words which you have been using in the presence of this lady?"

"Who are *you*, who presume to ask me

these questions ? ” enquired Harold, savagely confronting his antagonist with a look of intense hatred.

“ I am Robert Manvers ; engaged to Miss Vernon, whom I am about to make my wife, so I think you will allow I have a greater right to be here than you have ! ”

“ I deny it,” returned the other, hotly, “ I am her old love, Harold Trevelyan.”

“ Harold Trevelyan, are you, you audacious coward ! ” returned Manvers, overcome with ungovernable rage, “ and you have the impertinence to insult, by your presence, this woman whom you have so dishonourably wronged. Leave this house at once, you villain, or by heaven I’ll turn you out ! ”

“ Robert, Robert, it has all been a mistake,” pleaded Violet, holding his arm, in her fear that the two men would come to blows. “ It is all a mistake ! ” she repeated, “ he is innocent ! he loves me ! he has been faithful ! ”

“ It is no matter ! ” returned Manvers,

fiercely, almost beside himself in jealous anger, and apprehensive that Harold would deprive him of Violet in the hour of his triumph. "He had no right to suspect you, Violet ; he is unworthy of your love, because he doubted your constancy !"

"But evil tongues maligned us, Robert ! Poor Harold has been the dupe of deception ; as you love me, release me from my oath !"

"What ! release you from your oath, in order to see you wed Trevelyan ? Never !" he cried, impetuously, "I abide by what I have sworn. I am determined to make you my wife."

"Oh ! for the love of heaven, be generous, Robert, and return me my freedom of action," pleaded Violet, desperately. "I will not marry Harold ! I will marry neither. I will promise faithfully to remain always as I am !"

"I cannot !" returned Manvers, decidedly. "Love may be immortal, but honour, too, must be immaculate. I cannot cancel my

oath, neither can you honourably break yours."

"*Then I must abide by it,*" was the resigned rejoinder.

Harold Trevelyan stood dumbfounded and petrified; these last words from Violet appeared to have a stunning effect upon him.

"Is this your final decision?" he gasped, as one in excessive pain, and with despair and agony written in every line of his face.

"It must be, Harold! O, my God! that I had never lived to see this day! Harold, my own dear love! forgive me!" But Harold Trevelyan turned a deaf ear on her last frantic entreaty, and, as he staggered from the room, Violet, with a piteous cry, swooned before the door as it closed behind him.





CHAPTER X.

“LITERA SCRIPTA MANET.”

“Think nought a trifle, though it small appears,
Small sands the mountain,
Moments make the year,
And trifles—life.”

YOUNG.

HAROLD TREVELYAN, after his sudden and unexpected collapse of future hopes and happiness, in a desperate, burning desire for revenge, took that same day the train for Town. He knew the Westons were in London, though he had not seen them for many years ; but through Captain MacDonald, whose regiment had been quartered with his own at Aldershot, he learned that they had taken a house for two years near the Cromwell Road, close

to the Kensington Gardens and Museum. He was now bent on confronting Mrs. Weston with the deceptions she had practised on himself and Violet, and with all the heartfelt bitter disappointment he had that day experienced, Harold longed to vent his rage in curses on this woman who had, through her malicious, dishonourable actions, blasted and withered the happiness of his life.

On arriving in Town, he drove to the house which had formerly belonged to Miss Trevelyan, but which was now his own, his aunt having died some years previously, leaving him heir to her entire property. Harold had never rejoiced at this good fortune, the house was a burthen to him, and towards the money he manifested a contempt which characterized the cynic he had become. It is true that a day or two ago he had contemplated with some degree of pleasure, the comfort Violet might derive from this pretty house in Mayfair, but all such thoughts as these had

changed to gall and wormwood, with only a bitter revenge for the present, and a dark future of despair awaiting him.

Harold had never let his aunt's house, so that it remained in exactly the same state as she had left it. He was not in want of the money which he would derive by having a tenant, and for the same reason he had not troubled to sell it. So he kept on old faithful Dorothy, who had been Miss Trevelyan's cook for upwards of twenty years, to look after this *bijou* residence, with a small girl, a distant relation of her own, to keep Dorothy company. Since he had been quartered at Aldershot and Brighton, Harold had found a certain little convenience in having this house, and frequently slept the night here. Dorothy, as she opened the door for her master, and greeted him to-day with her ordinary friendly smile, received nothing but a morose, churlish reply for her pains.

"Yes, he intended sleeping the night, and

should require a fire in his bedroom, also one in the dining-room, which was to be lighted as soon as possible, as he wanted to sit there."

"Would he require anything to eat?"

"No, nothing beyond biscuits, and brandy-and-water, which she could place on the dining-room table, ready for him."

Whilst Dorothy and the girl were busy executing the curt orders they had received, Harold, with impatient, excitable movements, took a survey of the house. He explored the bedrooms, furnished as his aunt had left them, and wearing that appearance of studied neatness, observable in all rooms unaccustomed to be occupied. On his way downstairs he took a peep into the drawing-room. Harold had once thought it a pretty room, and any unbiassed mind would have been of the self-same opinion, but in his present pessimist ideas on things in general, he considered it hateful and ugly. He cast his eye in the direction of the empty conservatory,

and a dark frown crossed his brow, as he recollected that evening of humiliation, when he had himself been the fool and dupe of the designing Florence Lancaster. Shutting the drawing-room door with a bang which resounded over the whole house, he went back into the hall, and, scowling on faithful Dorothy, who he encountered awaiting further orders, he bade her begone, for he would ring should he require anything further. In the dining-room hung portraits of his father and mother. The former he did not remember, for he had died when Harold was only four years old ; but, in his uneasy paces to and fro, he stopped to gaze on his mother, and began to wonder whether she would sympathize with him in his present troubles were she living now. Yes, he was sure she would. For had not his mother been always his best friend and counsellor—and had not all his misfortunes dated from the time of her death? Had he not gambled

away his patrimony because he had lost the moral influence of his mother, and if he had not lost his fortune, he would have been able to have married Violet when he first learned to love her at Nice, and then all would have been well. But with his first reckless step in the downward direction, ill-luck flourished like a bay tree, and forced him to eat of its bitter fruits. His poverty had deprived him of his independence, and had goaded him into being the easy prey of a treacherous, unscrupulous woman, who despised his hand which he was willing to barter for gold, with a triumphant scorn, which had engraved itself on his soul's memory, and would be a torturing landmark of shame to his dying day. Then, when fortune began to smile, and he possessed the house in Mayfair, and many thousands to the good were lying idle at his agents ; when men envied him in his position of commanding one of the finest cavalry regiments in the Queen's service, and women

thought him the handsomest man they had ever seen—the canker had eaten too deeply into the vitality of his enjoyment, so that the sweets of life to his vitiated palate only tasted *bitter*. Lastly had come one ray of gladness to his saddened soul, and, revelling in the enthusiastic expectation of a fool's paradise, he had risen that very morning with hopes youthful as the dreams of his boyhood, and with a *verve* for life which accompanied the resuscitation of his hopes, and hinged themselves on an Utopian future with her whom he had loved, which would repay him for his humiliating past. But these hopes of the morning—whither had they flown? They no longer sent a flood of joy into his heart, they had gone, and left the foolish dreamer desolate. The dews of Aurora had watered his hawthorn, but the yew grew in its place by the evening.

* * * * *

It wanted a quarter to nine by his watch, as Harold, after drinking off his last stiff glass of brandy-and-water, crushed his hat over his aching brows and walked in the direction of the Cromwell Road. "She will be alone, Charlie will be at his club. I will make her share my cup of bitterness and taste some of its dregs," he thought, as with a wild, delirious hatred kindling within his breast, he trod the gas-lit streets with a burning desire for vengeance.

Mrs. Weston was alone in her drawing-room as he conjectured, and threw down the "Whitehall Review" as she sprang from her chair to greet him.

"Oh, Harold, this is kind! and so unexpected, too! It is quite an age since I have seen anything of you? Why, what is the matter, are you ill? You look so dreadfully pale!" said Mrs. Weston, in tones of alarm, as he pushed her roughly aside, and, with a sinister gleam in his dark eyes, strode

hastily across the room. "Are you ill, Harold?" she repeated nervously, as she caught his fierce glance, and felt a cold terror steal over her.

"Ill? Yes, so ill that I have come to you to be nursed!" he replied, in a harsh grating voice, "I am mad with despair, Mrs. Weston, and I have come to quench my burning thirst with revenge. Revenge!" added he, with a bitter laugh, "revenge is a poor solace! a cup of hemlock would be more comforting!"

"Harold; you frighten me! explain the meaning of these dreadful words. Tell me what ails you? What new trouble is this which has befallen you, my poor fellow? You may depend on having your old friend, Lucy Weston's sympathy, whatever it may be," added she, endeavouring to calm his unnatural agitation with soft words, which were so ill chosen under the circumstances that they increased his wrath tenfold.

"In heaven's name, hold your false tongue.

I am in no humour to be trifled with, but perhaps," continued he, suddenly changing his tone to cutting sarcasm, "as you are such a *very dear old friend*, I should be glad of your sympathy in my new trouble ! Can you help me to understand this ?" and with his face distorted with passion, Harold held before his trembling victim the letter which he had obtained that same morning from Violet. "I see you have not forgotten this instance of your perfidy," he pursued, with a savage gleam of satisfaction, as he beheld the guilty woman cower before him. "It is by no means an agreeable thing to be detected in a fraud ! Fraud, did I say ? I beg your pardon, I meant to have said '*a friendly action* !'"

"Harold, believe me, I did it all in kindness," faltered the trembling woman. "It was wrong of me to practice deceit, but I knew you would ruin yourself by this foolish attachment, and I wished to save you."

"Ruin myself by this foolish attachment !"

he shouted, exasperated by her words, " could I be more ruined in hopes and happiness than I am at present, thanks to you, you accursed woman, by your audacious interference. You have blighted my life ! You have been as a deadly nightshade to it. You have torn up the roots of a faithful loving heart and dragged it in the dust of humiliation, and this treachery you presumptuously term *kindness*. What right had you to stain our pure love with such foul perfidy ? What right had you to blast a young life with sorrows, and bring down youthful years with mourning ? What right had you to part me from the one woman I so passionately loved ? What right had you to tamper with our letters, and malign fidelity with your brazen falsehoods ? You have the audacity to tell me you have done all this for my good, because your grovelling thoughts could soar no higher than the prospect of this paltry fortune from my aunt. Can you not imagine what wormwood

this accursed dross is to me, when I think of all that has been sacrificed to gain it? Of what use is this filthy lucre to a man who looks back on his sad past, and mourns over what might have been? You have crossed me in my happiness. You have driven me to deceit and dishonour, and made me the dupe of derision! You separated me from Violet, whom I loved, that I might become the rejected suitor of perfidious Florence."

"Harold, you wrong me," interrupted Mrs. Weston piteously, as the tears flooded her eyes and poured down her cheeks. "You wrong me!" she repeated. "Whatever my other offences have been, I swear I always thought Florence Lancaster loved you. On the same day that she refused your hand I refused her friendship, and I have never exchanged one word with her since. She deceived me as much as she did you. I have acted a treacherous part towards you, Harold, but I never intended such a cruel wound as you received with Florence Lancaster's scorn. But

she has reaped her reward, for I hear she is a most unhappy woman, and has separated from her husband, who has ruined her with gambling."

"What do I care what she has done, or is doing?" broke in Harold, with fierce impatience, "I have come to pay off old scores. Say what you can in defence of this letter!" he cried, holding it menacingly towards her. "What made you pen those foul lies to me at Rome? What miserable object had you in view, when you laid these deep schemes to part love from love? Look at this witness of your dishonourable actions and see if you cannot summon up courage for *one* more lie to refute ever having sent it."

"Yes, yes, I sent it!" she gasped, "I never thought you loved her so much. Tell me where you found it?"

"*She*, who you have so barbarously wronged, gave it me," he answered, hoarse with rage.

"Violet Vernon unearthed your treachery

from her bosom ; she cherished thus your serpentine lies that stung her, because she thought they came from me, and in her transcendent fidelity her loving constant heart *loved on.*"

" Then you have seen her, and she is faithful ! Oh, Harold, I cannot tell you what joy I feel ! I began to dread I had done you an irreparable injury, and that it was too late to redeem this unlucky past ! I swear I acted for the best ! Forgive me Harold, and in your future happiness let me take my portion as your mother's friend."

" Peace, woman ! in heaven's name ! peace, I say ! or you will drive me to frenzy ! I have lost her for ever ! It is all too late !—*too late !*"

And with a cry of bitter agony Harold sank into a chair, and burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

" What do you mean by too late ? Tell me all about it ! Is Violet married ? Is she

dead ? Tell me all you know, Harold, and if I can in any way undo the past, I swear I will move heaven and earth to accomplish it at the entire sacrifice of myself," and casting herself on her knees before him, Mrs. Weston clasped his hands within her own. "Harold, dearest Harold ! is there nothing I can do ? I never thought you loved her like this ! say, can I do nothing ?"

"It is all too late ! I have for ever lost my love !" he cried, in hollow tones of despair, as he spurned with his foot the supplicating woman whose remorseful tears were falling on his hands.

"Violet has taken an oath to marry another, and the angels themselves could not persuade her to break the fealty of her solemn affirmation ! It is all too late ! *I have lost her !*"

"Then she cannot really love you, Harold ! true love would break the chains of adamant, though they had been forged as manacles

for honour. Violet is faithless ! My poor fellow ! ”

“ Accursed fiend ! ” he exclaimed, as his dark eyes kindled with a deadly hatred, and a murderous impulse leaped in his breast and spent itself in the fury of his impulsive passion, “ Accursed fiend ! would you dare to accuse my love of infidelity ? You sordid, low minded, ignoble wretch, ” he cried, hissing each word between his teeth, “ take back your foul lie ! take it back, I say ! Swallow it with this— ” and in the wild rage of his delirious despair, which carried away like an avalanche all the self-control of his manly nature, he clenched his fist and dealt a dastard blow at the crouching, supplicating woman kneeling before him. She fell back with a heavy thud upon the floor, and Harold Trevelyan, with the blackest of all stains on his proud, brave manhood, rushed like a maniac from the room.



CHAPTER XI.

“MACHPELAH.”

“Oh! my love! My own own love!
My love who loved me so!
Is there never a chink in the world above,
Where they listen to words from below?”

* * * * *

ABRAHAM MANVERS, grandfather to the present owner of Castle Manvers, had been a man of most eccentric habits, though clear-headed and shrewd in all matters relating to business; besides possessing extensive literary knowledge, which his energetic, intelligent mind had turned to good account on all occasions. During his lifetime he had completed many

beneficial changes on his picturesque ancestral property; and likewise advocated several alterations and improvements in the village of Crookly, of which he was the chief parishioner and lord of the manor. Most of the neat stone-built cottages in the parish had been built by him; and the quaint little church, with its solid Norman tower, was almost entirely indebted to his munificence for its restoration. In the chancel of this church, reposed the cherished remains of Manvers, dating some years before the Reformation. Stained glass memorial windows, with monuments and tablets, bore the names of the departed, with Latin and English inscriptions in old English characters; many of which were effaced by mutilation during the civil wars, as well as by the ravages made by the unsparing hand of time.

When Abraham Manvers consented to contribute handsomely to the restoration of the church, his first thought was to make the

family monuments an important feature in the interior repairs of the structure, which he perceived had suffered considerably from neglect in the time of his predecessors ; who had sadly often been in too impecunious a state to trouble much about their ancestors' intra-mural remains. It so happened that whilst personally superintending these repairs, Abraham Manvers bethought himself of the necessity of choosing his own future resting-place. Being aware of the fact that the capacious vault in the chancel had had its last unoccupied place filled up by his late father, he realised the expediency of establishing an entirely new piece of ground, wherein to lay his own bones, and the generations of Manvers' who came after him. He had, however, for many years past, been strangely impressed with the great unhealthiness of intra-mural burial, and though few men were more conservative than himself in all things relating to the traditional customs

of ancestry, Abraham Manvers was yet inclined to make a very radical change in the new burial place for the mortuary remains of his family. To the construction of another vault inside the church, he based objections on sanitary grounds ; and to the churchyard he had an equal dislike, as it was a very small, low-lying marshy piece of land, and none too extensive to meet the requirements of the village of Crookly and the neighbourhood. Still, he had no wish to have either his own remains, or those belonging to any member of his family buried elsewhere than in their own parish ; and as he possessed a wife, six sons, and two daughters, who were all inhabiting the Castle, the radical change he contemplated was to establish a private cemetery for himself and heirs in a field which he had purchased some years previously with this object in view, but which his conservative scruples had hitherto withheld him from laying out to the aforementioned purpose.

It must be remembered that Abraham Manvers belonged more to the 18th than the 19th century. And solely to the fact of his extensive literary attainments having imbued him with the freethought, materialistic notions which stamped that era with the famous writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Pope may be attributed his broad views and that absence of prejudice, which was rare in English country gentlemen with staunch Tory proclivities and the insular notions which prevailed during the last century, and at the beginning of the present. So that, though it may appear absurd to us in these days, accustomed as we are to the ornamental, extensive cemeteries which have sprung up near all our large towns, we must not forget that in Abraham Manvers' lifetime, cemeteries were non-existent; as he lived and died many years before the injurious system of interment within the limited space of an overcrowded churchyard, or within the church itself,

underwent that severe condemnation from the sanitary reformers of 1844, which had so much to do with reconciling the living to the prospect of forsaking their dear departed, and take to the newly established cemeteries ; as they indulged a refinement of taste in the laying out of these grounds with beautiful trees, shrubs, and flowers, interspersed with artistic, sculptural monuments. All such places were, however, as I have said, quite unknown in Abraham Manvers' time, though the numerous notes in his diary, and other writings which were discovered after his death, bore ample testimony of his being well acquainted with the Roman funeral pile, the Egyptian method of embalmment, and the practice of incremation, which is supposed to trace its origin as far back as the age of bronze. There were written proofs, too, of his having read of the Pyramids, the temples in Hindustan, the Castle of St. Angelo, the beautiful tomb of Caecilia Metella,

and the monument at Halicarnassus, raised to Mausolus, king of Caria. Many extracts were also found between the pages of books in his library, bearing reference to other existing relics of architectural splendour, which the proud ages of the past have raised as transcendent monuments to their memorable dead. From these facts there can be no doubt that ancient and modern methods of burial must have occupied Abraham Manvers' thoughts for many years, before he established the new family burial ground, which was made a year after the church restoration had been completed. The land selected for this purpose was a three cornered piece of ground which bordered the river and deer park of Castle Manvers, on the south-west extremity, and was rather over two acres in extent.

This family cemetery at Crookly, Abraham Manvers entered in the entail of the old house and deer park, and after its consecration,

gave it the name of Machpelah, because he likened it to the first burial ground mentioned in Scripture made by Abraham the great patriarchal forefather, when he bought *the field of Ephron, in Machpelah, which was before Mamre: which was made sure unto him for a possession of a burying place by the sons of Heth.**

* * * * *

It was a clear moonlight night late in October, and the stars were shining bright as diamonds in the Heavens, when a vehicle drawn by two jaded horses, drew up at the Manvers' Arms in the village of 'Crookly. From the inside alighted a tall man with a very commanding appearance, but with a melancholy weariness in the expression of his handsome face, which bore testimony to his having traversed the life-path of sadness. Handing his medium-sized portmanteau

* See Genesis xxiii.

to Mr. Cherry, the proprietor of the inn, who had come out to welcome him, the stranger enquired whether there was such a thing as a horse and trap to be hired in the village, as he would require to be driven back to the railway station early on the following morning. On receiving a satisfactory answer from Mr. Cherry, he dismissed the driver of the vehicle drawn by the bony tired horses, who, with a grateful "Thank ye, sir!" for the liberal "tip" from his late fare, mounted his box and drove slowly back the ten miles to the railway station.

Scanning the stranger with marked curiosity, the proprietor of the Manvers' Inn conducted him into a small, neat parlour, and after receiving orders for the preparation of a bedroom, and a light repast, he withdrew, and left the new comer to himself. Calling his wife from the kitchen, Mr. Cherry repeated the orders he had received, and then scratching his head with a puzzled air, drew attention to

the name and the numerous railway labels on the portmanteau in his hand, belonging to the mysterious stranger.

“Trevelyan ! That be a Cornish name, ain’t it, Betty ? Leastways, Cornish or no, the Colonel be a right fine-looking swell, and we had best cook something for him as he won’t turn up his nose at. But what fixes me is, what he can want coming to this ’ere place, and at such a late time o’ day.”

“He can’t be such a very great gentleman if he’s only ordered poached eggs and bacon for his tea,” remarked Betty, contemptuously, who usually judged of her visitors by what they ordered for their meals, and the frugal fare of eggs and bacon had by no means a very hopeful prospect of making much out of the traveller. “Commercials are our best customers, Sam ; they usually orders a good bit more than poached eggs and bacon, even when the meal *is* their tea. This Colonel is no such fine swell in my estimation, and small

appetites don't pay us as night lodgers. You say he's off early to-morrow morning, Sam; half-past seven, I think you said he wants the trap? It's certainly a puzzle what he can have come for."

"The Colonel wants to catch the first train for town; he seems to be a great traveller, so maybe he've only taken this place on his way. He's a right mannered gentleman, Betty, if ever a one walked, and you'll say so when you goes in to lay the tea things."

"Humph!" said Betty, dubiously, not at all inclined to be carried away by her husband's admiration of the stranger, "I can't make out what he have come here for, Sam! What can his object be? He can do nothing to-night, and if he intends to be off by half-past seven to-morrow, he'll do nothing more than swallow his breakfast! So what have he come *here* for?"

Sam Cherry felt unable to make any satisfactory reply to his wife's enquiry concerning

the object of the gentleman's visit, so shrugging his shoulders, he mumbled out something about its being "None of their business," and reminding Betty to make haste with the tea, he took the portmanteau upstairs, and lit a fire in the bedroom which was to be occupied by the stranger.

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Harold Trevelyan, for it is he who sits in the parlour of the Manvers' Arms, at Crookly, is about to leave England for a long travel in foreign lands. A weary restlessness and an insatiable desire to be continually on the move has grown upon him; and in the variety of new scenes he finds a relaxation for his mind which still has a morbid inclination to brood over the sorrowful past. With the object of this incessant travelling, he has retired from the army, and is now about to spend his last night in his native land before he quits it for foreign climes in search of that

peace of mind which he fails to find at home. But before the moorings are cut and the anchor is weighed, he has something to accomplish which his soul yearns to perform; which is to visit the shrine of her who in death, as in life, is all that he holds most dear. He longs to kneel once more before the altar of his love before he goes forth as the weary traveller o'er the wide oceans and lands of the globe, seeking rest and finding none. This is Harold Trevelyan's last night in England, and he has come to bid his love a long Farewell.

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Mrs. Cherry, as she laid the tea things, made up her mind to lose no opportunity of finding out all she wanted to know about this mysterious stranger; and was quite ready to place her gossiping tongue at his disposal, provided he showed willingness in gratifying

her curiosity with regard to the object of his strange and apparently purposeless visit.

"Sam had been no fool in discerning *the gentleman*, though he had ordered only poached eggs and bacon for his tea," thought Betty, as she spread the tablecloth, and produced her white china tea service for the occasion. "A real handsome man, and no mistake!" she said to herself, as she took a scrutinizing glance at Harold, who was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to heed the presence of Betty, but sat gloomily looking into the fire with rather a vacant expression in his large dark eyes. "Maybe you feel tired and hungry after your long drive, sir, and I make no doubt you'd been a long journey before you come over our rough roads," remarked Mrs. Cherry, placing the hissing tea urn on the table, and announcing that the eggs and bacon were ready.

"Yes, I have been travelling all day. I left the North of Scotland early this morning ;

but I can't say I feel very hungry or particularly tired," replied Harold, slowly turning his chair to the table, and showing his indifference towards the repast by leaning back in the chair, and slowly pulling the long hairs of his moustache.

"It's a wonder you ain't more tired and hungry, after having come all the way from Scotland. And you intends going on again to-morrow, don't you, sir?"

"Yes, I must be in London before twelve, as I have business there which will occupy me for a few hours; and then I go on to Southampton to catch my steamer; so you see I don't intend to allow myself much rest!"

"Indeed you don't, sir. It seems you're well accustomed to long journeys. Ever been in this part of the world before, sir? We are very proud of our scenery!"

"I observed it was very fine as I came along the road. I have never been here before, but have heard of Crookly, and of

some people of the name of Manvers, who have a fine place near this. The deer park is quite close to the village, is it not?"

"Yes, sir; you come to the first gate about a quarter of a mile up the road. The old Castle is a pretty place, sir, but the squire lives in sad retirement since the death of his poor wife, and has seen no company this long while. The poor lady hardly lived a week after they were married, and left the squire quite beside himself with grief. Folks say Mr. Manvers haven't left the grounds since she were buried here, and the greater part of most days he spends in the family cemetery at her grave. My husband, Mr. Cherry, have seen the squire often walking across the park with his head down so sorrowful-like; and the gardeners say all the best flowers from the green-houses have to go to Machpelah. It'll be a sad home for the young ladies, Miss Maud and Miss Edith, I'm thinking. But maybe they'll stay a bit longer in London with

their aunt, poor young things ! This Mrs. Manvers was the squire's second wife ; he was never very happy with his first lady, who gave him a good bit of trouble. Some folks have notions as she were jealous of Miss Vernon, who lived as governess at the Castle at one time. I never heard the rights of the story, though it do seem like truth, seeing how soon the squire married her after his first lady died. I used often to see Miss Vernon with the children, when she lived as governess to the family, and always thought she had a very sweet face and gentle ways as would become any lady."

" Yes, a sweet face ! A very sweet face, !" replied Harold, in a hollow tone of voice, shading his pale, emotional features behind the large, old-fashioned tea urn.

" You knew the poor lady, then, sir ? "

" Yes, I knew her."

" Was she a great friend of yours, sir ? "

" Yes, a great friend."

"Then I s'pose you're a friend of the family?"

"Not quite that, but I have seen Mr. Manvers."

"There ain't no mystery in his coming here, after all," thought Mrs. Cherry, thoroughly satisfied and well pleased with the frank, straightforward answers she had drawn from Harold; and for any stranger to display a knowledge of the Manvers' family had always been a sufficient passport to obtain the trust and confidence of Betty Cherry.

"A nice, kind-hearted gentleman as ever breathed, is Mr. Manvers," she continued, wishing to give her visitor the full benefit of all she knew about the family, and perfectly unconscious of the emotional effect her words were having on her listener. "A nice, kind-hearted gentleman," repeated she, "and there isn't a man, woman or child in the village as don't feel sorry for the squire in his distress. His wife's death was a sad blow, and she

wasn't took seriously ill more than a week before ! Broke a blood vessel, and never rallied ! I always thought the poor young lady looked delicate when she lived here ; her face was always very pale and sad-looking. Mr. Manvers have placed a splendid monument to her memory in the cemetery, sir. He must have loved her very much, but it can't be healthy or sound-minded of him to spend so much time mourning over her grave."

Harold began to wish Mrs. Cherry would go and leave him to his own reflections. He had been disguising his inward emotions with a struggle ; had tasted nothing he had been eating, and he felt another mouthful would choke him.

Betty, however, had warmed into her favourite subject of conversation with strangers, and was therefore not easily to be restrained.

"I dare say you've heard of the cemetery, sir?" she went on. "The squire's grand-

father made it more than eighty years ago. There's not many living in the village as can mind the time. My husband's father remembers the first burial. Mr. Robert's grandmother was the first to lie in the new ground. It caused a great sensation in the village in them days, but Mr. Abraham had it all his own way, and none seemed to have any right to interfere with the burial of his good lady in Machpelah. There's many of the family as have been laid there since. I can mind when the late squire, Mr. Robert's father, was buried there. It's a pretty spot, and as cultivated as a garden. The squire has taken no end of pains about the ground since his poor wife has been buried there."

"Is it far from here? I will go and have a look at the place," said Harold, desperately.

"It's only a quarter of a mile up the road sir; you enter the same gate I mentioned before, but you won't be able to get inside

of the cemetery, because the entrance from the park is always kept locked."

"I shall only go a little way up the road and smoke my cigar," returned Harold, carelessly. And leaving the gossiping Mrs. Cherry to clear away the tea things, he buttoned on his overcoat, and walked out into the clear, frosty evening air.

"So the gates are locked, are they?" he thought, as he strode towards the cemetery with a wreath of Immortelles in the breast pocket of his coat.

What were the obstacles of bolts and bars to his strong, athletic limbs? It would take much more than the barriers of stone walls or iron gates to prevent him from attaining the object he has in view to-night. Nay, his desires would be rather to meet with some great obstructing foe who would contest his right of way, so that, by a desperate struggle, and a fight against enormous odds, he could

burst the chains of his great anguish, and, shattered in body, and wounded in spirit, he could lay himself down to sleep the sleep of a mortally wounded conqueror on his Love's hallowed grave.

His face has a rigid firmness in its expression, and betokens the suffering of that keenest of human pains—the sadness of a broken heart. He has reached the park, and walks towards the iron fencing which protects the yew hedge from the deer, and with the agility of a stag he bounds over the barrier, and finds himself inside the cemetery.

A small mortuary chapel faces him. By the clear moonlight, he can perceive that it has stained glass windows, and on the Gothic arch above the entrance door, he can read “Machpelah!”

He surveys the ground with that keenness of search which is termed hungry. There are few graves, not above twelve or fourteen in all; but many are hidden away in chosen

places, and some of the marble monuments are sheltered from the gaze of the curious by a wealth of trees and shrubs. But Harold has no need to examine the names on any of these stones, for her sacred grave is the prominent feature of the place.

A tall, white pillar stands on a slight elevation before him, and the polished marble gleams in the moonlight as water in the desert, as Harold staggers towards it like the weary pilgrim that he is, to quench his thirsty soul in grief.

That marble pillar, which is surmounted by a cherub, holding in its tiny hand a violet—fit emblem of her who rests beneath. He is not ten paces from the goal of his life! Oh! cruel irony of fate, that makes this goal his love's grave, and not her hymeneal altar! He pauses, for across the grave is stretched a man in all the abandon of grief. One glance suffices to convince Harold—it is Robert Manvers!

For a moment he hesitates to advance, but stands irresolute, with the Immortelles in his hand, gazing at the haggard, woe-begone face wreathed in dishevelled hair—of his rival. Should he turn back? No. His footsteps have been heard; his movements have been observed.

“What brings you here?” cried Manvers, in a hollow voice, rising from the ground with a fierce gesture, and regarding Harold with a wild, savage expression in his wasted-looking eyes. “This is my property. What right have you to trespass on ground which is hallowed with the sacred remains of my ancestry?”

“Love makes its own right of way, Manvers,” rejoined Harold, “and where the heart guides the foot, there is no such word as trespass.”

“It is well,” returned the other, doggedly. “She bade me tell you all, should fate again turn you across my path. It happens here,

so, before her monumental remains—*listen*. You are jealous of me, Trevelyan; you are jealous, because you fancy I stole that which you, with love, conquered. You are blind to the fact that *yours* was the victory, and that honour was all I bore away in my defeat. You were her first, last, and only love. She became my wife for the sake of honour, but she was yours at the altar of love. When Violet was living at my house as governess to my children, I learnt to love her, but integrity restrained me from an avowal. My wife was frequently away from home, and we were thrown much together. For a time I did my utmost to avoid her society, and confined myself to my study. I was unhappy in my marriage, and my wife, by her unamiable ways, had become alienated from me. One evening I had occasion to seek Miss Vernon's counsel; I yearned for sympathy, and knew she could give it. The delicious

moments passed swiftly by, and beguiled us from the lateness of the hour. The pleasure I experienced in these hours instilled new joys into my heart, and hope proved stronger than despondency. The following evening I could not again resist the temptation to imbibe the nectar of her sympathy, and in the enjoyment of her cultivated mind cast my domestic worries in the river of Lethe. On this second evening she became more confident than she had ever been before. We seemed like two hearts bursting the chains of our conventional reserve, because we could endure our fettered grief no longer. She told me her past history, her love for *you*, and when I abused and cursed your memory for the cold heartlessness and infidelity of your conduct towards her, she excused, and in every way palliated your offences, and forgave your unpardonable neglect. She loved you as only a woman like herself can love—with all her

soul, which was something too divine in the magnitude of its affections to suspect itself wronged. Emptying her heart to tell me of her soul's treasure, we again forgot the lateness of the hour, and were disturbed by the malicious interference of a servant, who bore a spiteful grudge against us both."

Here Robert Manvers paused ; the veins of his neck were swollen into knotted cords, and his face had that pinched look of anguish which showed his feelings were strung to their extreme tension ; but, with a determined effort, he suppressed his emotion, and continued—

"This servant entered the room the same moment I placed my hand on Violet's waist."

"Vile villain ! dishonourable scoundrel ! defend yourself, or, by heaven ! I'll have your life !" exclaimed Harold Trevelyan, maddened beyond all self-control by the sinister suggestion of his words, as, making a sudden spring

at Manvers, he held him by the throat with the fierce grip of a mastiff.

The two men were well matched in height and size ; their muscular strength would have been about equal, had their passions resulted in testing the resources of their sinews ; but, with one desperate jerk, Manvers disengaged himself from Harold's grasp.

"Trevelyan,!" cried he, "hear me to the end, and then act towards me as thou wilt. Look!" added he, drawing from his pocket a revolver, and offering it to his opponent, "I came here this evening with the intention of ending my broken-hearted existence. I meant to shoot myself beside this marble pillar ; but when I came upon this holy spot, I vowed her grave should never be desecrated with my suicide, and neither shall it now be made our duel ground. But, when I have told you all, in yonder park I will stand unflinchingly before you, ten, six, aye, three paces, if you

choose, and will thank your hand if it will discharge this at my breast."

"Manvers, enough! A man who can thus bravely face death, must indeed from guilt be stainless."

A tear fell from Harold's eye as he spoke, as, looking at Robert Manvers, he caught that electric affinity which contained magnanimity in the one glance, whilst it stamped admiration in that of the other; and, with that impulsive, emotional grandeur seen in true manhood, *Hand clasped Hand*.

"A mutual grief makes us kin," came from the one.

"We bury our enmity in her grave," broke from the other, and then a whispered "*Amen*" from both.

"We were innocent, so help me heaven!" continued Manvers, when he had sufficiently recovered, "but I was the unfortunate cause of doing Violet the greatest wrong a man can

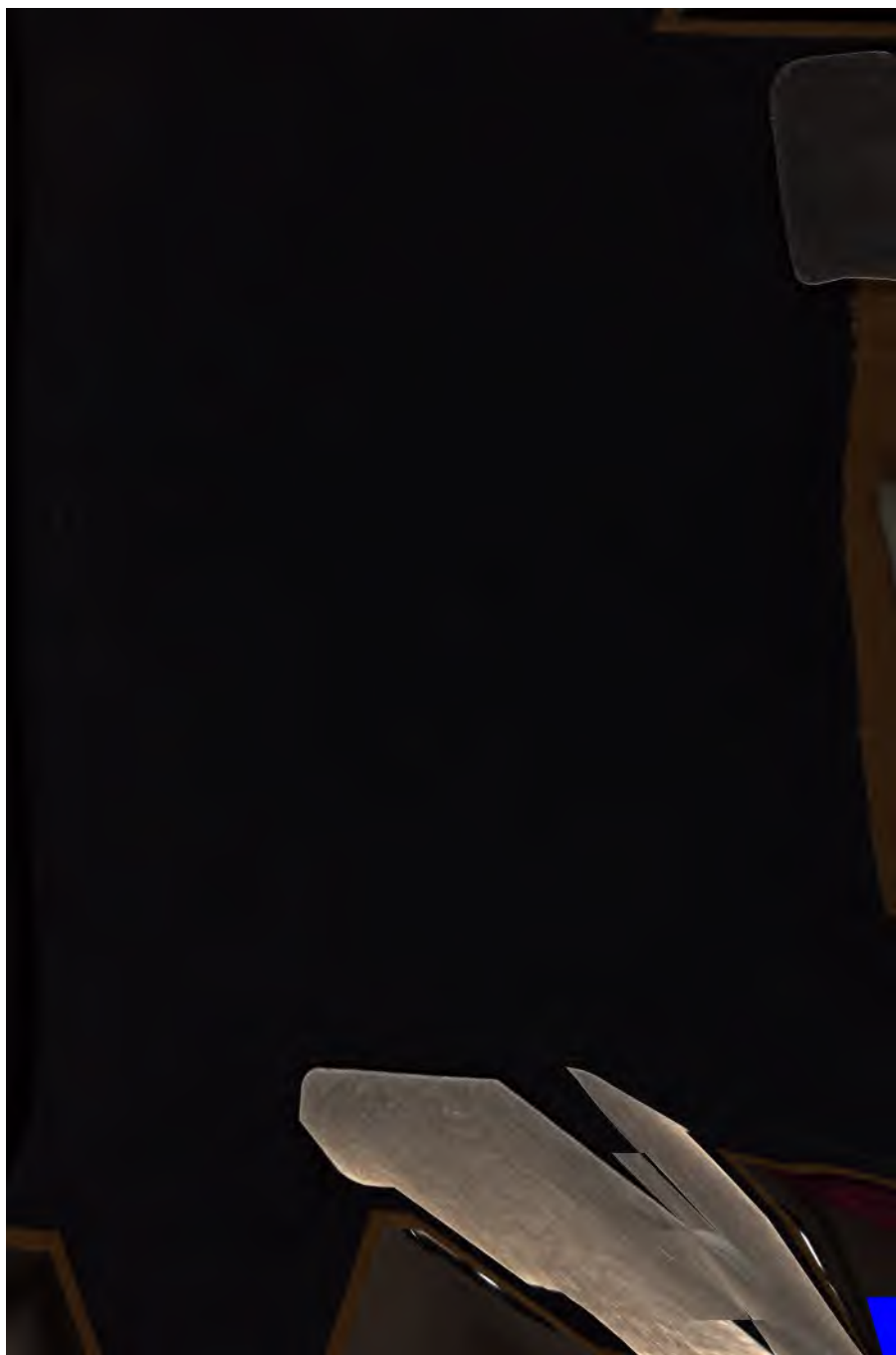
do a woman—I raised my wife's suspicions, who loaded her with the basest epithets, the foulest assertions, and thrust her from our doors with her spotless reputation sullied. There was then but one restitution possible for me to make her, and I made it: I offered to take a most solemn oath before Violet, and in the presence of Mr. Daniel, that I would marry her, should fate release me from the bond I made with my wife. But her conscientious mind refused to entertain any contract which hinged its fulfilment on the death of another. It was not until more than a year after, that, as a free man, I was able to offer her my hand and my heart; and to my dying day I shall never forget the joy I felt when she consented to be mine. It seemed almost too much happiness to be realised, and, fearing that some unforeseen event might yet rob me of her, I made her swear on what I knew to be the most sacred

religion of her life—*her first love*—that nothing on earth should prevent her from becoming my wife. You know the rest. My refusal to give her up at Brighton ; I couldn't do it, Trevelyan, it seemed so hard to give up the prize after I had so nearly won it. Then came our marriage, in which Death became her bridegroom. You fancy I had her heart with her hand, but such was never the case ; believe me, in this you wronged her. She was yours from the beginning, and she was yours to the last. She married me for honour's sake, but she had for years been wedded to you in her heart. Her last thoughts were yours, and the last word she breathed was—*Harold*. My triumph consists but in calling her my wife ; and placing to her memory this monument, which records a *Violet* gathered to the Manvers. An empty triumph ! for there it ceases, and dwindles into dwarf-like nothingness before that divine

privilege which is the title deed of united hearts. Go then Trevelyan to yonder pillar, and lay your *conquest* and my *defeat* alongside your wreath of Immortelles on Love's Altar."

THE END.





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